

International Institute of
Christian Ministries

LCL 105

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

FOR

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION

You are a person of privilege. You have been called to a leadership position in your church.

You have been selected because you have priceless treasure stored in your mind! Hidden in your heart is the key that can unlock the mystery of eternal life. Many people all around you live despairing lives because they don't know what you know. They desperately need to hear what you have learned about Jesus, the Savior of the world. They long for words fitly spoken that are like apples of gold in pictures of silver (Proverbs 25:11).

Clear communication makes it easy for people to understand how to be saved, and how to grow as Christians. You can learn the skills and develop the abilities to share the precious things that you know about Jesus. When you make these skills an active part of your life, all of your relationships will be richer and more satisfying.

Some of the secrets of good communication are very simple. It won't take you long to learn how to make them work well for you. Other skills require effort and determination. At first it may seem awkward and unnatural to do what is needed to communicate well. But perseverance will bring great rewards.

When you learn a new game or start a new job, it takes determination and persistence to become skillful. As you practice over and over again, and as you invest the necessary time and effort into the task, you will gain confidence and make good progress toward becoming a skilled communicator.

More important than learning the skills is acquiring the attitudes that form the foundation of good communication. So this study guide begins with an opportunity for you to consider some of the beliefs and ways of relating to people that can transform your interactions with others.

As you think about these things, you may conclude that you have some unlearning to do. Some of what you have long believed about people may need to be revised. But if you open your heart to the impressions of the Holy Spirit, you will come to understand what it means to “have the mind of Christ” to guide you as you relate to others.

We should accustom ourselves to speak in pleasant tones; to use pure, correct language, and words that are kind and courteous. Kind words are as dew and gentle showers to the soul.

Some with whom you are brought in contact will be rough and uncourteous, but because of this, do not be less courteous yourself. He who wishes to preserve his own self-respect must be careful not to wound needlessly the self-respect of others. This rule should be sacredly observed toward the dullest, the most blundering.

What God intends to do with these apparently unpromising ones, you do not know. He has in the past accepted persons no more promising or attractive to do a great work for Him (3SM 240.3).

The religion of Jesus softens whatever is hard and rough in the temper, and smooths whatever is rugged and sharp in the manners. It makes the words gentle and the demeanor winning. Let us learn from Christ how to combine a high sense of purity and integrity with sunniness of disposition. A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of Christianity (CM 73.2).

ESSENTIAL ATTITUDES

There are two important principles of communication that can help us understand how best to relate to others. As we think about them often, and determine to put them into practice every day, the two great communication commandments will have a transforming effect on our lives.

KEY POINTS

The first rule is to understand other people really well.

► Understand others well

This means that we must consciously focus our thinking on trying to grasp the meaning that lies behind the words that people speak. It also means that we must try to understand their experience and what it would feel like if we were in their place.

► Empathize

We need to train our eyes to be observant, and our ears to be attentive so that we will become skillful at understanding people. Beyond the images that enter our eyes, and the sounds that we hear, we need to tune our hearts to embrace the meaning behind the message.

The second rule is to make it very easy for others to understand us really well. This refers to the words we use, the way we use them, and our willingness to reveal how we really think and feel.

► Help others understand you

Be wise when you self-disclose. One extreme to avoid is the tendency to tell too much about yourself. If you are the constant focus of your conversation people will quickly tire of listening to you. And if you share highly personal details you will be thought of as tactless and indiscreet.

► Tell enough, but not too much

The other error to avoid is the practice of being so private about yourself that no one can ever get to know the real you. They want you to come out from behind the mask and show yourself to be an authentic, genuine person. It's hard to like someone who pretends to be what they are not. To keep these two great communication commandments with heart and mind and soul, it is helpful to consider the example of Jesus and the attitudes He had towards people.

► Let people see your humanity

Jesus loved and respected people too much to judge and condemn them.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17).

► He didn't condemn

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

► He didn't accuse

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more (John 11:7-8).

► Inspire hope

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned (Luke 6:37).

► Restrain the urge to criticize

Can you imagine how the woman felt that awful day when she was dragged and pushed and roughly thrust into the presence of Jesus?

► Empathy is feeling her pain in your heart

Can you see that shouting, threatening crowd? Men with rocks in their hands! Men with hatred in their hearts! Men with disgust and scorn in their sneering voices!

► Descriptive words help to make her experience real to us

She must have been overwhelmed by shame and guilt and remorse. She must have felt horror and terror about being stoned to death. And the

cruel taunts, the contempt, the loathing of her accusers, must have been like a knife twisting in her heart.

Then, unexpectedly, all was still. Like the calm after a violent storm, there was quietness all around. Her heart was flooded with amazement relief, peace, and gratitude. Jesus had spoken, and what He said changed everything. His words gave her assurance of acceptance and the promise of a new life.

Like Jesus, we can use words to reassure, to resolve conflict, and to soothe troubled hearts. People will be drawn to us because they see in us His kindness and genuine concern for them. They will recognize that we have high esteem toward them, that we restrain every impulse to judge, criticize, or condemn them, and that we strive to understand them by imagining how we would feel if we were in their place.

Like food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, when you extend true acceptance to others, you help meet a deep inner need. Their hearts long for the assurance that they are valued and appreciated in spite of their frailties.

Acceptance recognizes human fallibility but declares that mistakes and shortcomings will not be allowed to impair relationships. So when we accept people wholeheartedly in spite of their faults and flaws, their worth is affirmed and they are motivated to live lives worthy of our high regard of them.

► Feelings may change quickly.

► His example is safe to follow

► Acceptance is a basic human need

► Acceptance is needed most when we deserve it least

When Jesus demonstrated His acceptance of the adulteress, it was full and free, immediate and unconditional. He didn't say, If you live a perfect life from now on I will accept you because you will have passed the test. True, He did tell her to go and sin no more, but His acceptance of her was not based on barter. He didn't say if you do this then I'll do that. His acceptance of her was not given because she deserved it. She was clearly worthy of rejection and death instead.

► He accepted people unconditionally

Jesus accepted her because love looks beyond the blemishes. He saw in her the image of God. Twisted, distorted, and debased for sure; but the likeness of her Creator was still discernable.

► Look for the best, not the worst in people

As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul (COL 194.3).

Love takes the long view and focuses, not on what we are, but on what we may become through the transforming grace of God.

► Tell people that you have confidence in them

None are so vile, none have fallen so low, as to be beyond the working of this power (COL 96).

Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart (CH 440).

► Overcoming power is freely given to us

When we take this high view of people, when our attitudes toward others are consistently warm and accepting, when we spurn the blight of criticism and restrain the impulse to think ill of anyone, our lives, and the lives of

► Aspire to high purposes

others, will be enriched and brightened, to the glory of God.

Merciful Father! Help me to love and accept sinners, no matter how wicked their ways. Help me to see the good in others and give me the discernment to see what they may become through the transforming power of Your grace. And may my words be fitly spoken and seasoned with grace so that all will know that I hate the sin that distorts and destroys people's lives, but that I love the sinner for whom Christ died. For Jesus' sake, amen.

► The Source from Whom all blessings flow

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. Name two powerful motivators that can help you to communicate well? (p. 3)

2. Is the development of communication skills easy or hard? (p. 3)

3. What two qualities are needed in the learning process? (p.3)

4. What are the two great communication commandments? (p. 5)

5. What does it mean to empathize? (p. 5)

6. Name two attitudes that were exemplified in the life of Jesus that can transform our relationships with others. (p. 8)

7. Thought Question: What changes do you need to make in attitudes and actions so that you can give people full, free, unconditional acceptance, and at the same time love them wisely and well enough to lead them to forsake their sins?

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 10

1. The confidence that you can be effective in sharing what you know about Jesus.
The assurance that your relationships will be enriched.
2. Some aspects are easy to learn, other skills require time and effort.
3. Determination and persistence.
4. Understand other people really well.
Make it very easy for others to understand you really well.
5. Imagine how it would be to have the experience and feelings of the other person.
6. He accepted people unconditionally.
He focused on the best in people.
7. More about this in Chapter 6.

LISTENING WELL

God has given us two ears and one mouth so that we will listen twice as much as we speak. So goes an old saying that quaintly reminds us of the importance of using our ears well. It means that we must become conscious of the amount of time we spend speaking and the amount of time we spend listening.

When one person speaks all the time it is called a monologue. When two people take turns speaking to each other it is called a dialogue or a conversation. In a good conversation each person has approximately the same amount of time to speak. And there are also periods of quiet reflection when both persons can think about what has been said.

We use our ears well when we go beyond hearing and actually listen.

Hearing is an important first step toward listening. In order to hear well, we need to be near enough to the speaker so that what is said will be audible even if spoken softly. If you are not close enough, or if there is distracting noise, you may not be able to hear even though the person speaks clearly and with sufficient volume. When conversing about important matters, seek out a quiet place that is comfortable and free from distractions and interruptions. Be sure that no one else can hear when you are discussing private and personal information.

Listening goes beyond hearing. We can hear a person speaking without trying to make sense of what is being said. We may even be able to repeat

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Speak less, listen more

- ▶ Talk time is shared equally

- ▶ A time to be silent

- ▶ Nearness

- ▶ Quietness

- ▶ Appropriate place

- ▶ Respect people's privacy

back the exact words spoken without knowing what they mean. To listen well, we need to concentrate our full attention on trying to understand what the other person means.

There are a number of questions that we can ask ourselves that may help us to grasp the full meaning of what is said. The first is simply, What did the person say? One way to check how accurately you are hearing the content of what was spoken is to say it back to the person using fewer words. For example, if someone has spoken about her children, you could summarize by saying, “Your first-born is a girl called Susan. She’s followed by two boys, Tommy and Stan, and your youngest is a daughter named Teresa.”

This practice of repeating back the essence of what was said reassures the person that you heard the actual words that were spoken. If you got it wrong, the person will likely help you get it right, because accuracy is important to understanding.

The second question to ask yourself is, What can I learn from the way the words were spoken? Sometimes the way the words were said is different from the actual words spoken. Someone might say “I’m happy today” in a such a sad and melancholy way that you conclude that they actually mean the exact opposite of the words that were spoken.

Usually the words spoken and the way they are said match quite well, but when there seems to be a contradiction to what was said and how it

► QUESTION 1

► The actual words and sentences

► Brief summary of what was said

► QUESTION 2

► How were the words spoken?

was spoken, you need to clarify what was actually meant.

There are also times when people use indirect language to say what they mean. For example, a dying person may say “when the time comes” instead of “when I die” because it seems easier to say it, or easier to hear it that way. While being sensitive and tactful, it is important to get a clear understanding of what the person means, so summarize your understanding of what was meant in plain, unmistakable words.

► Clarify indirect communication

► Sensitivity

The third question to ask yourself is, What is the person feeling? At times there is no doubt about what the person’s emotions are because they actually use feeling words to describe what they are experiencing. They may say “I’m really angry because . . .” or “I feel so sad when . . .”

► QUESTION 3

In order to really understand the experience being described, it is helpful to allow yourself to feel some of the emotions that the person is feeling.

► Empathize

Paul encourages us to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). Again, he admonishes us to “comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Corinthians 1:4).

When you say, “My heart aches when I hear of your great loss,” the person feels much more understanding from you than if you were to say, “You had a great loss.”

The goal is to accurately convey to the person your understanding of the feelings that were expressed. Again, if you are not quite on target, you

may expect that people will help you understand better what they are experiencing. With practice you'll become really skilled at empathizing.

There are two extremes to avoid. The first is to become so caught up in the emotions and experience of the person that you lose control of your own feelings. You may become so upset, or so angry, or so sad that you can't think clearly, and you are in danger of saying or doing things that are not at all helpful.

► Avoid getting too involved in their feelings

The second error is to be so distant emotionally, so detached and unfeeling that the person wonders whether you could ever begin to understand what is happening in her life.

► Allow your heart to feel their pain

Some people have difficulty expressing their feelings. They may have no words to describe how they feel, or they may have grown up in a family that never expressed emotions. While they may not use feeling words when they speak, it is possible to guess at what they are feeling by listening carefully to what they say. And if you are able to put into words what they are feeling, but can't express, they will be grateful for your intuitive understanding.

► Make an educated guess

One way to tune in to their hidden feelings is to ask yourself, If I were experiencing what they are describing, how would I feel? Then go ahead and use a few feeling words to reflect what has been said, and see what happens.

► How would I feel?

You may enrich your collection of feeling words by studying the following:

POSITIVE FEELING WORDS

<u>HAPPY</u>	<u>EXCITED</u>	<u>SATISFIED</u>	<u>GRATEFUL</u>	<u>RELIEVED</u>	<u>CALM</u>	<u>ESTEEMED</u>
Ecstatic	Electrified	Contented	Thankful	Comforted	Composed	Appreciated
Elated	Delirious	Pleased	Appreciative	Freed	Peaceful	Respected
Overjoyed	Wild	Gratified	Blessed	Encouraged	Serene	Admired
Thrilled	Exhilarated	Indulged	Favored	Soothed	Unperturbed	Approved
Jubilant	Fired up	Pampered	Advantaged	Reassured	Untroubled	Cherished
Fantastic	Breathless	Comfortable	Glad	Cheered	Tranquil	Adored
Exuberant	Animated	Triumphant	Delighted	Consoled	Mellow	Honorable
Euphoric	Lively		Awestruck	Supported	Restful	Worthy
Cheerful	Energetic		Amazed	Unburdened	Quiescent	Valued
Light hearted	Vigorous		Overwhelmed	Feel better		Revered
Merry	Vibrant		Overcome	Breathe easier		Idolized
Jovial	Impassioned		Overjoyed	Relaxed		
Fervent	Tingly					
Joyful	Enraptured					
Blissful	High spirited					
	Zestful					
	Stirred					

NEGATIVE FEELING WORDS

<u>SAD</u>	<u>APATHETIC</u>	<u>DISCONTENT</u>	<u>DEPRIVED</u>	<u>DISTRESSED</u>	<u>ANXIOUS</u>	<u>INFERIOR</u>
Heavy hearted	Listless	Disgruntled	Bereft	Disturbed	Apprehensive	Worthless
Unhappy	Indifferent	Dissatisfied	Impoverished	Bothered	Afraid	Flawed
Joyless	Disinterested	Disappointed	Needy	Troubled	Fearful	Deficient
Dejected	Detached	Vexed	Down-and-out	Upset	Frightened	Inadequate
Despondent	Unconcerned	Peevish	Wretched	Annoyed	Terrified	Incapable
Hopeless	Lethargic	Displeased	Poor	Perturbed	Petrified	Incompetent
Blue	Numb	Resentful	Hard up	Disconcerted	Scared	Ineffective
Melancholy	Unfeeling	Restless	Destitute	Unsettled	Alarmed	Defective
Doleful	Dispassionate	Sulky	Penniless	Appalled	Worried	Imperfect
Gloomy	Unresponsive	Grouchy	Bankrupt	Annoyed	Tormented	Unimportant
Glum	Withdrawn	Cranky	Homeless	Exasperated	Remorseful	Pathetic
Morose	Impassive	Crabby	Indigent	Irked	Ashamed	Impaired
Heart sore	Inexcitable	Disillusioned	Broke	Irritated	Contrite	Faulty
Heartbroken	Oblivious	Disenchanted	Depleted	Angry	Guilty	Dull
Mournful	Blah	Crestfallen	Drained	Irate	Chagrined	Dumb
Sorrowful	Burned out		Unfortunate	Furious	Embarrassed	Stupid
Disconsolate			Pitiable	Enraged	Humiliated	Dense
Desolate			Miserable	Outraged	Mortified	Ignorant
Forlorn			Crushed	Indignant		Brainless
Despairing			Afflicted	Annoyed		Foolish
Discouraged			Oppressed	Dismayed		Crazy
Woeful				Horrificed		Weird
Dispirited				Disgusted		Peculiar
Grief-stricken				Shocked		Strange
Inconsolable				Infuriated		Odd
Depressed						

The fourth question that may aid your understanding is, What do they mean? This gets to the heart of the matter. You simply can't understand people well if you don't know what they mean.

▶ QUESTION 4

So combine "What was said" with "How it was said" and "What feelings were expressed" and you will probably get pretty close to what was meant.

▶ Understanding meaning

Some people start out with a very clear idea about what they want to convey. If they are good at language they will carefully select the words that are most likely to make plain what they mean. If they are able to speak clearly, and there are no noisy distractions, it is likely that the listener will hear what was said. If the hearer is alert and attentive, and if the hearer understands the meaning of the words, and if the hearer is tuned in to the feelings of the speaker, and if the hearer can make sense of it all, then it is likely that the meaning that the speaker intended to communicate will indeed be grasped and understood.

▶ Clear meaning

▶ Word selection

▶ Speak distinctly

▶ No distractions

▶ Active listening

▶ Understandable

▶ Feelings heard

▶ Meaning shared

Notice that every link in the chain of communication must be present. If a link is missing, the meaning may be distorted or lost in transmission.

The circle of communication is only complete when the listener repeats back the meaning, and the speaker confirms that "meaning sent = meaning received."

▶ I know you understand what I mean

Many misunderstandings occur when people start out with no clear understanding of what they mean. They simply start talking with no idea about where they will end up, and along the way they may or may not

▶ Think before you speak

figure out what they mean. Even a highly skilled listener will have difficulty trying to unravel that tangle of words!

Another challenging situation is when people's emotions are so highly charged that they are unable to talk coherently, their words inflame the feelings of those around, and matters may get badly out of control.

▶ Control your emotions

Even in trying situations such as these, you will be able to make sense of what is going on if you take your time, and patiently, attentively assist the persons to help you understand what they mean.

▶ Use your skills

Lastly, it's important to ask yourself the question, Is what was said really true? Some people deliberately bend and distort the truth, while others do so unwittingly. The unskilled liar is quite easy to recognize, but the person who makes a living through deceit and cunning is able to intentionally mislead others so craftily that they don't even know that they have been fooled. Even among Christians there are those who live double lives. They are models of uprightness when they go to church, but their everyday lives are marred by duplicity. What they say doesn't match what they do.

▶ QUESTION 5

It's important to recognize that distrust can be toxic to relationships.

▶ Deliberately deceptive

You could make yourself truly miserable if you questioned everything that everyone said. And if you cherish a spirit of cynical skepticism, people will feel uneasy in your presence and will avoid you.

▶ Inconsistency

On the other hand, if you are so trusting of everyone that you believe everything that is said, you'll be known as gullible and naïve. People will

▶ Suspiciousness hurts relationships

▶ Trust too easily

take advantage of you and find enjoyment in making fun at your expense.

While avoiding these extremes, it is important to get a sense of how much faith can be placed on what is said. It is possible for a person to be misinformed or self-deceived. They may innocently say something that is quite wrong. Whatever the case, we need to be alert to the possibility that what is said is not “the whole truth and nothing but the truth” and make allowances in our thinking for the person’s inaccuracies.

► Unintentionally untruthful

The way we respond when something doesn’t sound quite right is crucial. It doesn’t help to be offended or to accuse the person of lying. It’s much better to respond in a way that shows that, though you may not believe or accept all that was said, yet you still have respect for the individual’s perspective.

► Respond wisely

A person may sincerely believe something to be so even when the facts of the situation lead to a different conclusion. For example, you might say to a woman who is upset about something that happened to her child at school, “It seems pretty clear to you that Jimmy took your daughter’s math book even though he denies that he did so.” or, “You feel really angry when you think that Jimmy could have taken your daughter’s book and then lied about it.”

► Respond respectfully

Notice that in phrasing your response like this you are neither agreeing nor disagreeing with what she said, but you are showing that you understand her frustration with the situation as she sees it.

► Respond perceptively

► Accurate understanding

For the most part, it is not helpful to correct people when you think they are wrong about something. When you point out an error people usually become defensive or insistent that they are right and you are wrong. So it's better to simply reflect back what you heard them say than to take a position on the truthfulness of the statement. An argumentative and contentious spirit stirs up unholy feelings and rarely changes the thinking of people.

► Defending one's own wrong beliefs strengthens them

Wherever the power of intellect, of authority, or of force is employed, and love is not manifestly present, the affections and will of those whom we seek to reach assume a defensive, repelling position, and their strength of resistance is increased (2T 135).

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead people to an understanding of truth (John 16:13), and as He impresses us, we can speak words of truth clearly and persuasively, and leave the results to Him. We can rely on Him to help us to know when to speak a word for Him and how to find the best words to use (Matthew 10:19, 20).

► Listen well before you speak

He [Jesus] never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight (GW 117).

In Chapter 1 we learned that a judgmental attitude was foreign to Christ. Although He knew that the people had faulty thinking and twisted ideas, He accepted them just as they were. So the focus should not be on the correctness of what a person says, but on our ability to understand what is said, what is meant, and the importance of the meaning.

Merciful Father, give me ears that really hear what people say. Help me to be alert to discrepancies between what a person says and the way it is said. Give me a heart to feel what others feel, and the sensitivity to speak words that will convey my genuine empathy. Grant me the insight to discern the meaning behind the words and the ability to grasp the significance of what is meant. Give me a sanctified intuition that will sense when what is said is untrue or a distortion of the truth, and the wisdom to know how to respond in a winsome way. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, I pray, Amen.

► The Source of true discernment

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. Explain why the skill of repeating back the content of what was said is so important. (p. 13)

2. What two errors should we avoid when empathizing with the feelings of others? (p. 15)

3. In what two ways can you use the words on pages 16 & 17 to improve communication?

4. On page 18 it is shown that accurate communication happens when:

5. When we consider the truthfulness of what we hear, what two extremes should we avoid? (p. 19)

6. Why is it not advisable to correct a person when we think they are not telling the truth? (p. 21)

7. Thought Question: What changes do you need to make in order to improve the quality of your listening skills?

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 23

1. The practice of repeating back the essence of what was said reassures the person that you heard the actual words that were spoken.
2. Avoid getting overly involved in their feelings, and avoid shutting yourself off from what they are feeling.
3. Use the words to understand and express your own feelings, and use the words to reflect the feelings of the person speaking to you.
4. The meaning sent = the meaning received.
5. To be too suspicious, and to be too trusting.
6. People become defensive or argumentative when told that they are not telling the truth.
7. Indicate your present skill level for each of the following:

Accurately repeating back what was said

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
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Accurately reflecting the person's feelings

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
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Accurately understanding the meaning

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Discerning the accuracy of what is said

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Responding wisely and respectfully to error

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
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CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS

Speaking and hearing are important to good communication, but much more is involved. A smile or a frown, a raised eyebrow, a nod, or a wink may actually convey more meaning than the words that are spoken. You can read a person's lips even when the words are too soft to hear, and the gestures and other hand movements that people make often add a lot to the meaning of what is described.

If people sit with their arms and legs crossed we say that they have a closed or defensive posture. They may be feeling threatened or may not want to talk. When someone pounds his fist on the table or stamps his feet, it is obvious that he is angry. If tears come to a person's eyes we know that she is feeling sad even though no words may be spoken.

Facial expressions, body movements, and postural messages may have slightly different meanings in various cultures, but it is important to recognize and understand these clues that reveal what is happening in the heads and the hearts of people.

There are some who are so expressive in the way they present themselves that there is little doubt about what they feel. Others deliberately hide their emotions behind an inscrutable mask so that it is almost impossible to see how they are feeling. In the same way as people may use words to mislead, they can also act in ways that are intended to be confusing or deceptive. So we must use care in the

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Listen with your eyes

- ▶ Observe body language

- ▶ Actions speak louder than words

- ▶ Cultural variations

- ▶ Actors can do this very well

way we interpret what we see and check the accuracy of our inferences. It is so normal and natural for people to use body language to communicate that most of the time they don't even realize that they are doing so. It's also true that there are generally accepted ways of communicating through action that some people have never learned.

▶ Appearances can be deceiving

Whether you are standing or sitting, lean forward slightly when listening to someone. This indicates that you are attentive and eager to understand what is being said. Leaning back implies a lessening or lack of interest.

▶ Lean forward

Look at people's eyes when they speak and you will understand them better, and they will recognize that you are keenly interested in what they are saying. In some settings, looking at a person's eyes may provoke an angry response, or may be a sign of disrespect. However, in many Western societies if you do not make eye contact people assume that you are untrustworthy, or have something to hide.

▶ Make eye contact

There is a difference between looking at a person's eyes with a pleasant expression on your face, and staring at their eyes. A steady stare will likely make them feel awkward or threatened, so show a cheery face and look away from time to time to avoid making the person uncomfortable.

▶ Don't stare

Nod your head when it is appropriate to do so during the conversation.

▶ Smile with your eyes

This does not so much mean that you agree with what is said, but rather

▶ Nod your head

that you are following the conversation intently. It's annoying to see someone nod his head too fast, too often, or when it is more appropriate to turn the head from side to side. So use moderation when you nod your head, and get someone to watch you and tell you how well you are doing. In some cultures nodding the head means "no" and turning the head from side to side means "yes," so be sure you are sensitive to the customs of the person to whom you are speaking, and act accordingly.

If you turn your back on someone, that action is likely to be interpreted as rudeness or as a lack of interest. It may even be viewed as an insult.

By contrast, if you face a person when conversing this usually means that you are showing interest in what is being said. It's good to turn your body slightly either to the left or the right while still making eye contact, because facing a person directly may be seen by some as an aggressive stance.

► Face to face

In the same way that your posture of leaning forward signals interest, so too does the posture of the person to whom you are speaking. If she is turned away from you and is not making eye contact, you can infer that she is either not well engaged in the conversation or perhaps doesn't know what you know about the posture of conversational involvement.

► Observe level of involvement

Next we turn to the words and phrases that work well in interpersonal interactions. When you meet someone it is customary to say "hello," "good morning," "good afternoon," or "good day." Less formal terms

► Forms of greeting

include, “hi,” “hey,” “yo,” “howdy,” “how are you?”, “how you doin’?” “how goes it?”, etc. When used as greetings, these short questions are not really requests for information, and if they prompt a response it is usually something very brief such as “fine,” “pretty good,” “doing well,” “great, how about you?”, etc. The person that you address and the type of occasion should guide you in the choice of a more formal or a more casual greeting.

► Appropriateness

Next a comment is usually made about something of general interest such as the weather, a news story, or something that happened in the local community. “Weather’s pretty awful isn’t it?” “What a great day!” “What do you think about rising prices?” “Did you hear about what happened to Joe?”, etc. The response is usually just a few words in length because these questions are a polite way of exchanging pleasantries, not a serious inquiry about what the other person really thinks.

► Casual comments

A few more superficial questions and answers may go back and forth for a while, but for the most part these casual conversations don’t last very long and don’t go very deep.

► Small talk

Meaningful conversation begins when you or the other person says something that draws out a thoughtful response or an expression of feelings and the discussion deepens. Notice the transitions in the conversation on the next page.

► Meaningful conversation

A TYPICAL CONVERSATION

PRELIMINARIES	MAIN DISCUSSION	CONCLUSION
<p>Hello Mary! <i>Hi Susan, how are things going?</i> Great, how about you? <i>Pretty good, I guess. How are the kids?</i> They're doing fine, but they sure keep me running! Say, you're sounding a bit down today, is there something wrong?</p>	<p><i>Well, to tell you the truth I'm a bit worried about my husband. There has been some talk at work that the company may be laying off some employees, and because he has not been there as long as some of the other workers he feels that he may lose his job.</i> That sounds pretty scary! [Susan is responding to Mary's <u>feeling</u> of concern.] <i>What makes matters worse is that my son is starting college in a few weeks and that is going to put a large strain on our finances.</i> On the one hand you must be proud that Roger has been accepted into our Adventist College, but on the other hand you are troubled about how to pay the bills, especially so if Dan loses his job. [Susan reflects back the <u>content</u> of what was said and <u>adds</u> some details to the conversation based on her knowledge of the family.] <i>You're right about that, we are really glad that he has done so well in high school. He's a bright boy and he works hard to get good grades. The College has even given him a small scholarship in recognition of his academic performance.</i> That's wonderful news! I'm so happy for you. [Susan recognizes a <u>change</u> in Mary's <u>feelings</u> from worry to thankfulness and <u>her own feelings change</u> to match those of her friend.] <i>Yes the Lord has been really good to us in so many ways! We have our health, and we've been putting money away into a savings account for college from the day Roger was born, so we should be O.K. for a while. But I just don't seem to be able to stop worrying about Dan losing his job.</i> So the concern is not so much about Roger's school fees, but more about what will happen if Dan is laid off. [Susan notes that Mary's worry about college fees has lessened but her concern about Dan's possible job loss is still troublesome to her. This is mainly a reflection of <u>content</u> but includes a reference to Mary's <u>feelings</u>.] <i>That's right.</i> You've often told me not to worry, Mary, and that's been good advice! If Dan loses his job I'm sure the Lord will help him find something else. <i>I know you're right. I just need to trust Him more and leave tomorrow in His hands. Thanks so much for your support and reassurance, Susan!</i></p>	<p>Hey, that's what friends do! <i>Well I've got to run. Got to do some shopping before supper.</i> Sure glad I bumped into you today. <i>Me too. Say hi to the family.</i> O.K. Remember I'll be praying for you. <i>Thanks a lot!</i> See you later. <i>Bye.</i></p>

In this conversation, commonplace exchanges take place until Susan detects something in Mary's tone of voice or facial expression that raises a question in her thinking. When she asks about it, meaningful conversation begins.

As often happens when people talk about personal matters, two or more problems emerge that are related in some way. Good conversation leads to a better understanding of each issue and to a decision about what needs to be done.

Notice the important part that feelings played, and how these changed as different parts of the discussion were addressed. In the end, Mary felt relieved of some of the anxiety she had been feeling, as her fears were replaced by a greater sense of trust in God.

Note, too, that the exchanges during the Preliminaries were quite superficial, what was said during the Main Discussion was much deeper and more significant, and that there was a natural transition back to more superficial material in the Conclusion phase.

The conversation on the next page is different because emotions are not a central focus in the discussion. So conversations can be deep because feelings play a large role in the issues at stake, and conversations can be deep when intellectual matters take center stage, and emotions are incidental to the plot. In this case, a very practical application emerges from the discussion of Sharon's theological and philosophical problem.

► Problems tend to cluster together

► A focus on feelings

► One phase leads to the next

► Focus on ideas

A TYPICAL CONVERSATION

PRELIMINARIES	MAIN DISCUSSION	CONCLUSION
<p>Greetings John! <i>Good morning Sharon, it's sure nice to see you.</i> Great to see you too on this beautiful morning. <i>After all that rain and gloomy weather lately it really lifts the spirits to see the sun again.</i> I know what you mean! Say, I was meaning to tell you how much I appreciated your Sabbath School lesson last week. <i>Glad you enjoyed it. What was it that stirred your thinking?</i></p>	<p>You know, we were talking about forgiveness and you said something about forgiveness not being the same thing as cancelling a debt that someone owes you. That really got me thinking. <i>Yes, I found that idea in the book "Christ's Object lessons" in the chapter on forgiveness. It says that if someone owes you money and doesn't pay you back you are to forgive them for not paying it back, but the person is still obliged to repay the loan.</i> That makes so much sense to me, because the Bible says that we must lend to people when they ask for help, but if they never return what is borrowed that's like stealing isn't it? <i>You're right about that! In fact if a person promises to return something that was borrowed from you and fails to do so, two of the commandments are broken, "Thou shalt not steal", and "Thou shalt not bear false witness". Promise-breaking and stealing are serious sins, and we should not simply "forgive and forget" in order to be "nice."</i> I remember reading somewhere in the New Testament that we should rebuke people when they do something wrong, and not repaying a loan seems pretty bad to me. <i>It's Paul that said "Reprove, rebuke, exhort", and the Old Testament instructs that we should "not suffer sin upon a brother", so we do have a responsibility to lovingly warn people about the folly of doing what is wrong.</i> Well there's someone who owes me money and she just keeps making one excuse after another for not paying it back, and I thought that I should just let it go, cancel the debt and forgive her. However, I see now that if I do that I'm really making it easier for her to go on sinning, and that doesn't make any sense. <i>Giving a gift is one thing, making a loan is another. If you decide to convert the loan into a gift, that's a kind and generous thing to do, but mistaken kindness can sometimes hurt more than it helps.</i> I'm going to ask God to give me the right attitude and the right words, but I'm determined to tell her kindly and firmly to pay me back the money she owes. <i>Sounds good to me!</i></p>	<p>Thanks so much for helping me sort things out about this. <i>It's always a pleasure to talk to you Sharon. You're so sincere about finding out about God's will in your life, and that's an inspiration to me.</i> I enjoy talking with you too because you're such a wise guy! Just teasing! <i>See you on Sabbath!</i> Looking forward to it! <i>God bless.</i> Good bye.</p>

Whether a discussion is primarily of an intellectual nature or is focused

mostly on emotions and experience, it is not polite to “preach a sermon,” “give a lecture,” or provide a lengthy description about some matter of personal interest. The error of too much self-focus may be avoided if you take turns talking, and if you intentionally examine the topic from several points of view.

▶ Don’t preach or lecture

▶ Rich exchange of ideas

It is acceptable to respond to a question about your health by giving a brief summary of what happened during your recent illness, but supplying comprehensive details about your hospital stay and the medical procedures is typically far more information than most people want to hear. Of course, if the person is genuinely interested in you and specifically asks for more particulars, you may speak more freely about what happened. All the same, when someone asks about your health they are showing a personal interest in you, but are usually not expecting a lengthy monologue about your physical well-being. So give a brief response to the questioner, but then quickly redirect the conversation to the other person or to a different topic.

▶ Too much information

▶ Polite interest

A related issue of importance is, how much information should be shared by people during conversations in small or larger groups?

▶ How much is too much?

In a large group, speak in general terms and disclose few personal details.

▶ Large group few details

In a smaller group of trusted friends, you can be a bit more open about yourself. If you need help about a personal matter, you may share more

information with a trustworthy pastor or counselor. However, there are some things that you should never tell to anyone.

Unless you are wrought upon by the Holy Spirit in special manner to confess your sins of private nature to man, do not breathe them to any soul (CH 373).

Some people who don't understand this principle may start telling you about very personal things. You can help them to be more discreet by saying, "I really don't need to hear all the details," or "I understand where you are going with this, but I prefer not to hear all about it."

► Manage the flow of information

On the other hand, the Bible instructs us:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed (James 5:16).

And Ellen White comments:

Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you (SC 37).

Keep nothing back from God, and neglect not the confession of your faults to the brethren when they have a connection with them (FE 239).

► Confess some faults - but not all

It seems clear that even in the confession of our faults to one another as Christian brothers and sisters, we are not to burden each other with our mistakes and failings that have no direct connection to the hearers.

On very rare occasions pastors, teachers, or church leaders may be called upon to help people who are so distressed in their minds about their troubles that they feel compelled to talk about them. However

distasteful or upsetting this may be, we are encouraged, under these extreme circumstances, and as faithful under-shepherds of Christ to,

listen with sympathy to heartbreaking recitals of wrong, of degradation, of despair and misery (GW 184).

► Unpleasant responsibility

If we are ever called upon to minister in this way, we must remember three things. Never probe or question the person to get more details in order to satisfy an unsanctified curiosity. Never share what was revealed with anyone else. And pray earnestly that God will neutralize the corrosive effect of the person's disclosure upon our own hearts and minds.

The second guideline that will help to regulate the depth of personal self-disclosure is to remember that gossips and faultfinders may hear what you say.

► Avoid damage to your reputation

No matter how nice you are, some people will dislike you. This was true for Jesus, and as His followers we may expect to have detractors and enemies too. Many times we will not know who it is in the group who will use what we say to hurt us, therefore we need to be prudent about how much we say about ourselves.

The third guideline that can inform us about how we can self-disclose wisely and well is the recognition that there may be very sensitive and vulnerable people listening to us who might suffer serious negative effects from what we say.

► Avoid causing damage to sensitive people

I have been shown that many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate. Seeds of evil are scattered in the minds and hearts of those who hear, and when they are under temptation, these seeds will spring up and bear fruit, and the same sad experience will be repeated. For, think the tempted ones, these sins cannot be so very grievous; for did not those who have made confession, Christians of long standing, do these very things? Thus the open confession in the church of these secret sins will prove a savor of death rather than of life (5T 645).

► Consider the impact of what you say

You may have been present when well-intentioned people told dramatic stories about all the terrible things they did before they met Jesus. They spoke of drug use, of sexual promiscuity, of stealing and swearing, of gang warfare, and maybe even of murder. Then they end up by saying how glad they are that God saved them from all the wickedness of the past.

► Misguided testimonies

Of course, we're all glad that God saved them, but it sometimes seems that Satan gets more glory in the telling of these stories than God does. Perhaps more troubling is the effect on some young people who may get the idea that they had better go out and sin a lot so that they, too, will have dramatic testimonies to give. This kind of grave error can be avoided if people understand and apply the principles of appropriate self-disclosure.

► Unintended consequences

There are several secrets that good conversationalists use that can help you to be more effective in the way you communicate. Remember the names of people and use them occasionally during conversations. This leads people to feel that they are important to you, and that you have enough interest in them to make an effort to remember who they are.

► Remember people's names

Find out what people like to talk about and become informed about what is important to them. It's a whole lot easier to talk about what you do know than about what you don't know. So if you want people to be at ease when they are with you, talk about things that are familiar to them.

► Study their interests

Ask thoughtful questions. A closed-ended question can be answered with a few words and does not normally lead to any discussion. So questions like, "What's the time?" or "Have you had lunch?" or "Do you enjoy tennis?" will usually not spark animated conversation. On the other hand, open-ended questions like these will likely elicit fascinating responses: "What places did you visit during your vacation?" "How is your favorite sports hero doing this season?" "What are some of the most interesting challenges about your job?" "What hopes and dreams do you have for your children?" "What do you like best about your friends?" "What do you think about . . .?" "How do you feel about . . .?" "Would you share your opinion about . . .?"

► Thoughtful questions

Avoid interrupting, arguing, criticizing, flattering, and showing off. We sometimes slip into bad habits without even realizing it, and these social mistakes can cost us dearly. Sarcasm, contradiction, making jokes at others' expense, talking while someone else is speaking, and using psychological pressure to manipulate people are also tactics that should be avoided.

► Conversation killers

Affirmation is very different from flattery. It is sincerity that makes it so beneficial to conversation. Here are some phrases that show your high regard for people in a way that makes them feel appreciated.

“What I like about your idea is . . .” “I really appreciate the way you . . .”
“I learned a lot from the way you handled that situation.” “When you gave that illustration it helped a lot.” “I noticed the kind way you dealt with . . .” “You clearly put a lot of thought into your presentation.” “What moved me was your willingness to share of yourself.” “The lay-out and attractiveness of your hand-outs were very impressive to me.” “The message of your song touched me deeply.”

Conversations form a very important part of the fabric of our lives.

If we weave bright and beautiful threads into our discussions, we will be blessed and so will our hearers.

Gracious God, help me to remember to do the simple things like leaning toward my listeners, and making eye-contact and smiling at them. May I learn and remember words of greeting and phrases that promote meaningful conversation. Teach me to consider my words before I speak, and give me discernment and discretion as I self-disclose. Give me an understanding mind and a compassionate heart to hear about the hurts and heartaches of those in need, and may I find words that will be like a healing balm to them. Make me aware of ways in which I can improve all my interactions with others, to the glory of Your Name, Amen.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. What is the difference between casual conversation and meaningful conversation? (p. 28)

2. What three guidelines help us to decide about the depth of self-disclosure? (pp. 32, 34, 35)

3. What five guidelines can help improve the quality of conversations?

4. Thought Question: What changes do you need to make in order to improve the quality of your conversational skills?

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 38

1. Superficial questions and answers in casual conversation, & thoughtful responses and the expression of feelings in meaningful conversation.
2. The size of the group, detractors or enemies may misuse what you say, & avoid causing damage to sensitive people.
3. Remember people's names, study people's interests, ask thoughtful questions, avoid conversation killers, & use conversation boosters.
4. Indicate your present skill level for each of the following:

Understanding body language

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Facing and leaning toward the person

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Making appropriate eye contact

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Self-disclosure

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

Managing the give-and-take of conversation

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

PHONE CALLS, LETTERS, AND E-MAILS

Some of the conversational skills described in the previous chapters also apply when speaking on the phone and when writing letters or electronic mail. For instance, paying close attention to the content and feelings expressed by the other person is still important, but making eye-contact and observing body language is impossible when the other person is not in the same location with you, except where a video link is available.

Without these important visual cues, both speaker and listener need to work much harder to avoid misunderstandings.

When using the phone, remember to speak up and pronounce your words clearly so that the other person will have no difficulty understanding what you are saying. Background noise can interfere with transmission, so use a phone that is located in a quiet space whenever possible.

Whether you are using a conventional phone or a mobile phone, remember that your conversation can be overheard by people around you and by those who use legal and illegal means to tap into your phone. So use good judgment about discussing private or confidential matters on the phone.

Be considerate when using a mobile phone. Most people find it irritating to have to listen to someone else's cell phone conversation, especially in a confined space like a car or restaurant where they can't easily move away. So when you make or receive a call on a mobile phone, do so in a way that will cause the least possible inconvenience to others.

KEY POINTS

► More effort is needed

► Privacy matters

► Be courteous and considerate

It is particularly offensive when you interrupt a conversation to receive an incoming call. Your action implies that the person who is speaking to you is less important than the phone call. If it's a really urgent call, the person will likely keep calling until you respond. Graciously finish your conversation before attending to the phone call.

► Be polite

Of course, the person who phones you is important too. It is common courtesy to call back as soon as possible, especially so if a message has been recorded on your answering service. Not all incoming calls are welcome, and you may certainly choose to not answer if it is an inconvenient time to respond or if your caller identification service shows that a marketing person wants your attention. Even when it is a nuisance call you can politely ask the person to remove your name from their calling list or courteously request that the person stop bothering you. The telephone company can help you prevent people from making offensive and prank calls to your number.

► Be gracious

Before you make a call, think about the other person. Ask yourself, is this a reasonable time to call, or is the person likely eating or sleeping or not wishing to be interrupted? Give some thought to what you are going to say so that you don't take up more of the person's time than is necessary. And when you make the call, it's polite to greet the person and ask, "Is this a convenient time to talk?"

► Be thoughtful

Generally speaking, phone calls fall into two categories. Businesslike calls

are usually short and to the point. They usually relate to an exchange of needed information, requests, and setting up appointments. They often begin with both persons giving their names and then the caller states the purpose of the call.

► Formal calls

Hello, this is George Smith. Hi, this is Susan Jones. I'm calling on behalf of the nominating committee to ask if you would be willing to serve as a deacon this year. Well, that's kind of you to ask. I'm pretty sure that would work out alright, but I'd like to pray about it with my wife before I make a decision. I'm glad to hear that you are willing to consider it. Would it be convenient for me to call back on Thursday to find out what you have decided? Sure, I'm usually home around this time. Thanks a lot. You're welcome. Goodbye till Thursday. Bye.

The second kind are social calls in which people chat about whatever is of interest to them. These calls often have the same shape as the conversation on page 29, with Preliminaries, Main Discussion, and Conclusion. What is discussed may be broad, ranging over many topics, or it may go deeper on one or two issues.

► Social calls

A phone call is a wonderful way to keep in touch with friends and family and to keep up on what's happening in people's lives. There are many lonely people who would love to receive a call from you, and this is a convenient and time-efficient way of "visiting" them and ministering to their social needs.

Remember that phone calls cost money and that the longer one talks, the larger the phone bill is likely to be. So after a reasonable amount of time say something like, "It's been so good talking to you again," or "I've got to run,

► Be respectful

thanks so much for calling.” Exchange goodbyes and then hang up.

Finally, turn off your phone in church and at other gatherings, and remember that it is dangerous to talk on the phone while you are driving!

► Be thoughtful

As a church leader, you may be called upon to write letters about church business, or someone in the congregation may ask you to write a letter on their behalf. Again, letters may be categorized as formal or social, and there are rules and conventions that guide one in the choice of words and the style of writing that are appropriate for different purposes.

In formal letters it is important to follow a standard format because people are accustomed to finding the various elements of the letter in predictable positions on the page.

► Correct form

Most business letters should be no longer than a page, and preferably half a page or less. This means that sentences should be short and clearly worded, and all flowery descriptions and unnecessary elaborations eliminated. If the idea can be expressed well in a few short words, use them. Busy people want to get right to the point. Make it easy for them to do so.

► Clear and concise

Remember to use good grammar. Check that all the words are spelled correctly, and that the typing or printing is clear and straight on the page.

► Good grammar

Note the placement of all the elements in this formal business letter:

Friendly Seventh-Day Adventist Church
777 Sunny Street
Harmony Hollow, MI 49104

July 25, 2005

Ms. Susan Shingleton
Sales Manager
Apex Roofing Specialists
567 Commercial Drive
Harmony Hollow, MI 49104

Dear Ms. Shingleton:

Re: Estimate for roof repair.

The Church Board has authorized me to get estimates to repair the storm damage to the roof of the church at the above address.

We are requesting two estimates: repair to the damaged section only, and repair to the damaged section plus removal and replacement of shingles on the entire roof.

The replacement shingles must match the color of the shingles that are on the roof at present and must carry a 15-20 year warranty.

Please include a statement of intent that describes how you plan to complete the work as quickly as possible, and with the least amount of disruption to the church programs.

Sincerely,

Thomas Tally
Church Accountant

tt/js

Enclosure: photograph of damage

- ▶ Letterhead

- ▶ Two blank lines

- ▶ Date line
- ▶ Two blank lines

- ▶ Inside address includes name and title of the person receiving the letter

- ▶ One blank line
- ▶ Salutation
- ▶ One blank line
- ▶ Subject line
- ▶ One blank line
- ▶ Body of letter single spaced
- ▶ One blank line between paragraphs

- ▶ Three blank lines for signature

- ▶ Name of sender
- ▶ Title of sender
- ▶ One blank line
- ▶ Identification line
- ▶ Additional information

The number of blank lines between the letterhead and the date line may vary between one and five, depending on the length of the letter. If the body of the letter is very short, there may be up to ten blank lines between the date line and the inside address line. In this widely used, full-block format there is no indentation of the first lines of paragraphs.

► Body of letter is vertically centered on the page

The identification line indicates who prepared the letter. In this example Thomas Tally composed the letter, as indicated by his initials, tt, but it was typed by someone else whose initials, js, appear after the slash. If Thomas prepared and typed the letter his initials would appear like this, tt with no slash or period after them.

If copies of the letter were sent to other people this must be shown on the last line of the letter with no period following the names. cc: Cheryl Smiley, Larry Lovejoy

► Professional courtesy

While formal letters are still a very important part of business and personal communication, electronic mail, or e-mail has become the means of sending billions of messages each day. It is so popular because of the speed and ease with which people can exchange ideas, and because it is so easy to file and keep track of memos and letters sent electronically. Graphics, photos, sound recordings, and video files can also be sent as attachments to e-mail messages. However, as a general rule very large files should be sub-divided to make transmission easier.

► Amazing possibilities

The format of a formal e-memo appears on the next page.

MEMO

To: Church Board Members

► This section may be single-spaced

From: Pastor Paul

Date: July 25, 2005

Re: Urgent meeting

Please meet after the prayer service on Wednesday evening in the boardroom to discuss roof-repair estimates.

► Clear and specific

Severe weather is forecast for next weekend. We must choose a contractor to fix the roof ASAP.

Note that there are no greetings or pleasantries included in a memo.

Short sentences and as few words as possible are best for e-mails. Set your line length to about sixty characters, and limit the number of lines to what can be seen on the screen without scrolling down. Shorter is better because people are less likely to read a long message.

► Shorter is better

Check for spelling and grammar. Don't use all upper or all lower case letters. Cute little smiley faces and other emoticons are fine in casual e-mails to friends, but should not be used in formal communications.

Use as much care as you would on an important letter, and don't click the *send* button until you have double checked everything.

► Double check

Most of what applies to memos also applies to formal letters sent by e-mail. However, the letter begins with a salutation, *Dear Mr. Jones*, and ends with *Sincerely*, and your name. Below your name you may include the kind of information typically found on a well laid-out

business card. Store this information in a signature file for re-use on other letters.

When replying to e-mail, focus on understanding the meaning in the mind of the sender before you compose your reply. If you answer a question that wasn't asked instead of the one that was asked, you've wasted your own time and that of the other person.

► Understand the question

A hasty reply given when you're upset will likely cause distress to others and damage to your reputation. Before you click *send* take a break, re-read your message, and reconsider whether you really want to send it. And double, double check that you don't click on *reply to all* when you only want the reply to go to the sender.

► Serenity of mind
quietness of spirit

Remember that once you have sent an e-mail, others may access and read what you wrote to the recipient, so be careful not to divulge private and sensitive information that could be misused by unethical persons.

► Protect privacy

Gracious Father, thank you for all the marvelous inventions that make it possible to communicate with ease and convenience with people all around the world. Give me the desire to speak on the phone with a smile in my voice, and a willingness to listen with an understanding heart to the words that are spoken. In the letters I write and the e-mails I send, may I be particular about the way I write and careful about what I write. May I follow the Carpenter's example who was only satisfied with His work when He had done His very best. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

► Gratitude for good gifts

► Readiness to receive more

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. Describe five telephone courtesy guidelines. (pp. 40-43)

2. Describe three guidelines that apply to the writing of formal letters. (p. 43)

3. Describe three guidelines that apply to the writing of formal electronic mail. (p. 46)

4. Thought Question: What changes do you need to make in order to improve the quality of your telephone, letter-writing, and electronic-mail skills?

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 48

1. Make calls where others do not have to listen to your phone conversation.
Don't interrupt a conversation with someone to take an incoming phone call.
When someone leaves a message asking you to call them, do so promptly.
Make calls at times that are likely to be convenient for the recipient.
Turn your mobile phone off when you are in public gatherings.
2. Follow correct form. Write clearly and concisely. Use correct grammar and spelling.
3. Be very clear and specific. Shorter is better. Double check for correctness before sending.
4. Indicate your present skill level for each of the following:

Receiving and making telephone calls	Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Composing and writing formal letters	Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Preparing formal e-mail messages	Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Following courtesy guidelines	Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Ability to manage emotions well	Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS AND PERSUASION

You may know people who talk a lot, but say very little. They have no shortage of words, but they have nothing meaningful to say. Those who attend public gatherings have a right to expect that something worthwhile will be said. After all, who wants to waste time listening to boring speeches? So, effective public presentations are deep enough to stimulate interest but not so deep that no one understands what's being discussed.

KEY POINTS

► Not too shallow

► Not too deep

Another reason why some speeches are boring is because they are presented in a dull and tiresome way. The content may be interesting, but the speaker lacks the skill and charisma to captivate the audience. In fact, a gifted speechmaker can take very dull and boring material and present it so well that people will rave over the unforgettable performance.

The best speeches or lectures or sermons happen when an appreciative audience hears interesting material presented by a talented communicator.

► Great material
great presentation

There's only so much that can be done to ready an audience to be receptive, but we can do a lot to make sure that what we present is interesting and that we deliver the message in a winsome way.

It all begins with preparation. And the starting point is on your knees.

► The best
preparation

Pray that God will guide your mind to discover what He wants you to speak about, and pray that He will prepare your heart so that you will be an authentic and credible spokesperson for Him.

After selecting the subject, it is helpful to decide about the goal of your

presentation. What kind of response do you want your presentation to draw from the audience? The goal of a comedian is to make people laugh. The goal of a sales speech is to make a sale. The goal of a sermon on conversion is to inspire people to make a decision for Christ.

► Goal-focused presentation

The goal and the audience must match. There's no sense in aiming to inform young women about motherhood if the audience is made up of men. So it's important to know what kind of people will be in the audience, and what their interests are. This understanding will guide you to know what to say and how to say it.

► Match the goal to the audience

Once you have decided what you want to accomplish with your presentation, you can start putting ideas down on paper. It's preferable to do this kind of brain-storming before you look at what others have written on the topic because you want your presentation to ring true to what you personally believe.

► Authentically your own

Some have found it helpful to write each idea on a separate card or scrap of paper so that it's easy to move the pieces around on a table like one does when completing a jigsaw puzzle. If there are "missing pieces," this process helps you to know what to look for when you read what others have written on the topic.

► Organize your ideas

There are books and magazines that cover every imaginable topic, and the Internet makes it easy to search for information. Remember to be cautious about accepting as truth whatever appears in print or on the

► Use credible sources

Internet. And take care to separate fact from opinion as you read. Next, start writing your first unpolished version of the presentation. Many people get stuck on writing projects because they want what they write to be perfect from the start. It's much better to finish a rough draft than to spend all your time on one well-crafted sentence! So finish the rough draft first, and then rewrite and refine it into the final draft which will be the foundation of your speech.

- ▶ Get it done
refine it later

Begin with a strong, clear statement of the main point you wish to make. First impressions are key, so don't fumble around with irrelevant remarks when you start. Capture the attention of your audience with a sentence that raises questions in their minds or that challenges their normal assumptions.

- ▶ Grab their
attention

Every second of every day two people die and four babies are born. Our mission outreach isn't even close to keeping up with population growth now. So how can we possibly tell everyone on earth about Jesus and His soon return? There is a way, a very surprising way, to get the job done.

- ▶ Startling statistic
- ▶ Identify with them
- ▶ Arouse curiosity

After the introduction, you present the evidence and arguments that support the position that you are taking.

First we need to keep on doing what we know is effective. We know that medical missionary work opens doors that are barred to any other form of evangelism. We know that ADRA is making life-transforming changes in the lives of multitudes of despairing people. We know that Adventist World Radio is reaching the minds and hearts of millions who have no other means of learning about salvation.

- ▶ Recognition of
accomplishments

We dare not withdraw our support for these and scores of

other powerful outreach ministries that are bringing the the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to searching souls in cities, in villages, and in the remotest areas of the earth.

But we must do more!

It's no secret that at some levels of the Church organization budgets have been slashed and programs have been axed because less and less money is flowing in to fund our vital outreach endeavors.

► Recognition of real challenges

This alarming crisis demands the best efforts of our brightest minds to identify and address the root causes.

It demands that the appointed stewards of God's money manage His means intelligently and faithfully.

And it demands a recognition by every person in the pew that giving is not an option. It is a divine imperative that we disregard at our peril.

These things must be done! But we must do more!

In this information age we must harness the creative genius of our young thought leaders to produce innovative and exciting ways to link to computer-savvy minds.

► Recognition of new possibilities

Using a spin-off from the methodology of Google we must employ the power of millions of computers to nimbly, legally, and non-offensively introduce the essence of the Gospel to those who spend hours each day at the computer.

This we must do! But we must also do less!

► Unexpected twist

Yes, we must do less. We must "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Ex. 14:13). Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chron 20:15).

► Change of focus

"Men make the work of advancing the truth tenfold harder than it really is, by seeking to take God's work out of His hands into their own finite hands" (Ev. 635).

► Warning against human folly

“The Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning.” “God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands” (Ev 118).

▶ The surprising way “to get the job done” is to let God do His own work!

“For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth” (Rom 9:28).

▶ Scriptural assurance

After all the arguments have been presented in the main section of the presentation, the conclusion summarizes all that has been said and calls for action.

Every second two people die and four babies are born. Humanly speaking, it is utterly impossible for us to reach everyone on planet earth with the Gospel message. Yet we know that is exactly what must be done.

▶ Restatement of introductory assertion

We dare not stop doing what we know is succeeding. We must overcome the financial obstacles to progress. And we must try radical new approaches to evangelism.

▶ Summary of main arguments

But God does not call us to kill ourselves with worry, nor work ourselves to death by trying to do the impossible.

▶ Cautionary reminder

Instead He calls you and me to work diligently in the corner of the vineyard where He knows we can do our best work. He promises to provide all the strength and wisdom that we need to do our work well. And He assures us that He who knows no failure will take full responsibility for the accomplishment of His purposes.

▶ Encouragement

▶ Reassurance

If you want to praise Him for His steadfast love and tender mercies toward us, and if you want to rededicate yourself to serve Him with all your heart and mind and soul, will you stand with me as we pray.

▶ Call to action

The goal of this presentation was to stir people to re-dedicate themselves to service. We would know that the goal was achieved if people stood to their feet after the appeal, and if in subsequent conversations they reported that

▶ Measurable goal

they had indeed engaged in the work that God had called them to do.

It took many hours of work to write this six-minute devotional! Sentences and paragraphs were written and re-written many times. And it's quite possible that some more changes will be made during the next critical phase of preparation called rehearsal, because sometimes words that look great on paper don't sound as good when spoken.

Writing is one thing. Practicing your speech is another. Professional actors call this "knowing your lines." In movies and stage productions the lines must be memorized word for word and the actors must speak the words exactly as they were written. In other situations, speakers learn the material very thoroughly so that they can follow the sequence of ideas exactly, but they use the words that come to them as they speak. This gives the speech a quality of spontaneity and energy that is more interesting to the audience than a word-for-word reading or recitation of the material.

Here are some things to remember as you practice your presentation.

Say each word loudly and distinctly enough so that a slightly deaf person sitting in the back row will be able to understand you clearly. You may need to exaggerate the consonants slightly to do this and you will need to open your mouth wide enough for the sounds to come out freely. Speaking with your upper and lower teeth close together muffles the sounds.

- ▶ Be realistic about how long it takes to finish

- ▶ Practice makes perfect

- ▶ Memorize every word

- ▶ Memorize the ideas exactly

- ▶ More freedom of expression

- ▶ Speak distinctly

If there is a microphone, resist the temptation to touch it and adjust it. Any adjustments should be made ahead of time. As you speak, keep your nose pointed at the microphone and maintain a fairly constant distance between your mouth and the microphone. You can move your head so that you can focus on different people in the audience, but do so in such a way as to maintain a direct line between your mouth and the microphone. If it is a hand-held microphone, hold it to the side of your mouth rather than directly in front of it. This will prevent the distortion that occurs when consonants like “p” or “t” cause a blast of air to hit the microphone. Keep the front of the microphone pointing at your mouth from a distance of about three to four inches, and avoid “handling noise” by not moving the microphone around in your hand, and by not playing with the microphone cable. Work with the sound operator ahead of time so that the public address system will not be set too loud or too soft for your voice.

► Microphone know-how

► Speak directly toward the mic

► Eliminate “plosives”

► Constant distance

As you rehearse your speech, remember that the whole idea is to get your message across clearly to the listeners. If you speak too fast, some won’t be able to keep up. If you speak too slowly, some will tune you out. If you speak at a steady constant speed, you may put some to sleep. So vary the pace to fit what you are saying. You may also say some of the words louder than others for emphasis and variety, but avoid extreme changes in volume. Change the tone and inflection of your voice and remember to

► Pace yourself

► Vary the volume

pause briefly from time to time to let the message sink in.

► Dramatic pause

It sometimes happens that people focus so much upon remembering all the dos and don'ts that the speech sounds artificial, as if they are trying to "put on an act." It's better to speak from the heart in a natural way than to try to "sound professional" or imitate the way someone else speaks.

An important part of rehearsal is picturing yourself doing really well in your presentation. If you trouble your mind with fears of failure or rejection, you actually unfit yourself to do well. But if you imagine your delivery of the speech going really well, the mind goes to work to make that positive picture a reality.

► Mental preparation

A few minutes before the speech, go to the bathroom to check your appearance in the mirror. Take a few deep breaths to settle any nervousness that you may feel, and focus your mind on achieving your goal by praying that each person in the audience may be moved by the message.

► Professional appearance

► The prayer imperative

When you stand up to speak, pause for a moment and look out at the audience. Make eye contact with a few people, and begin speaking to them with confidence and enthusiasm. (You will have memorized your opening sentences, so don't look down at your notes before you begin). Smile and make natural movements with your hands as you speak, and build the energy and intensity of the message to an unforced climax as you conclude.

► Connect with your audience

► Pre-planned progression

These guidelines apply when you are giving a business speech or when speaking at a social gathering or when teaching the Sabbath School lesson. You may not be able to spend hours on every presentation, and with practice you will doubtless learn how to work more efficiently as you prepare. However, for the most part you will find that the more time and effort you put into the writing and rehearsing of your presentation, the more successful it will be.

► Thorough preparation sets you up for success

You will be much more likely to achieve the goal of your presentation or Bible study if you prepare the material in a persuasive way. This simply means that people are more likely to respond favorably to your call to action if you go about it in the right way.

► Persuasive presentation

Present several well-documented truths before you present the new assertion. This logical sequence of ideas prepares the minds of the hearers to respond positively when the new idea is presented.

► Logical sequence

If Jesus went to worship in the synagogue each Sabbath day, and if Paul worshiped on the Sabbath for years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and if there is no clear statement in the Bible that Sunday replaced the Sabbath as the day of worship, then we should do as Jesus did. We should keep the Sabbath holy, and worship God on His holy day.

Respectfully acknowledge the opposing arguments. You do not help your cause if you viciously attack the positions of those who differ with you.

► Respectful of opposing views

You may score a few points with those who like a fight, who are combative and contentious, but remember that they are likely to be fickle and apt to

change their allegiance easily. Many who shout “Hosanna” on Sunday cry “Crucify” on Friday!

It’s much better to try to win the respect of your opponents by your courteous and considerate behavior than by saying things that only antagonize and alienate them.

While there is no mention of the word “Sunday” in the New Testament, the term “First day of the week” appears eight times. Of the eight, the verse in Acts chapter 20:8 seems to provide the strongest evidence that Christians had religious services on Sunday.

► Candid presentation of counter arguments

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

To those who view this verse as persuasive evidence that Christians should worship on Sunday instead of Saturday, I respectfully ask this question: Do you consider this verse to be a stronger argument in favor of Sunday-keeping than the example of Jesus who consistently worshiped on Sabbath?

If you do, I urge you to follow your conscience. If you don’t, I encourage you to keep your mind open to the possibility that the evidence for a change from Sabbath, to Sunday worship, lacks conclusiveness.

Quote experts to support your position. Find a convincing statement by an authority that is well-recognized and well-respected even by those who hold opposing views, and present it to give credibility to your argument.

► Expert opinions

Present the benefits of acting in favor of your position, but don’t oversell the idea. Present the consequences of not acting in favor of your position,

► Present advantages and adverse outcomes

but don't overdo the negative appeal because people tend to respond negatively to manipulation.

Speak with conviction. If you sound as though you are not too sure about the topic yourself, you'll not inspire confidence in others.

▶ Inspire confidence

Give your own testimony and quote the testimony of others to demonstrate the validity of your position.

▶ Use powerful testimonials

Appeal to the best in people. Hold up worthy purposes and admirable ideals.

▶ Worthy ideals

A word of caution is in order. No one likes to be manipulated. And no Christian who is constrained by the love of Jesus will seek to manipulate others. So we should only use our knowledge about persuasive methods to serve the best interest of those we meet. At the same time, truth is exceedingly precious and it deserves to be presented in the best possible light!

▶ Never manipulate people

Gracious Father, I ask for wisdom to know how to prepare eloquent, goal-focused presentations that will touch the hearts of the hearers.

▶ The Source of creativity

I need your grace to help me to develop the skills that will enable me to deliver the messages in ways that will capture the attention and interest of those in my audiences. And I ask for the ability to employ methods of persuasion to reveal truth in all its beauty, to the honor of your Name.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, I pray, Amen.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. The best presentations happen when: (p. 50)

2. What should you do to ensure that what you say is well-suited to the audience? (p. 51)

3. How can you tell whether or not your presentation was successful? (p. 54)

4. As you rehearse and as you deliver your presentation what should you remember to do? (pp. 55-57)

5. Persuasive techniques may be used: (p. 60)

6. Thought Question: What changes do you need to make in order to improve the quality of the preparation of your presentations, and your delivery skills?

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 61

1. An appreciative audience hears interesting material presented by a talented communicator.
2. Match the goal of your presentation to the interests and needs of the audience.
3. Set a clear, reasonable goal and check to see whether or not the response of the audience matches your goal for them.
4. Speak distinctly. Use good microphone technique. Vary your tempo and volume. Vary the inflection and tone of your voice. Pause to let the meaning sink in.
5. Use persuasion in the best interests of your audience, but never to manipulate people to your own advantage

1. Indicate your present skill level for each of the following:

Topic selection and goal setting Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Writing and refining the presentation Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Using appropriate persuasion Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Delivering the message Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Measuring goal achievement Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

In a world of imperfect people, unpleasant conversations are unavoidable.

KEY POINTS

There are times when it is your duty to approach a person about a difficult situation, and there are times when troublesome conversations overtake you whether you are prepared for them or not.

► Conflict is inevitable

If ever the attitudes discussed in Chapter 1, and the skills described in Chapter 2 are needed, it is when you're involved in a difficult conversation.

► Right attitudes polished skills

And if ever we need help from Heaven, it is when we are under attack by an angry, bitter, critical, or controlling person. Jesus often found Himself verbally assaulted. The serenity and composure that He exhibited were secured through His connection with His Father.

► Steadfast under insult and attack

The soul that loves God will be able to stand the test of neglect, of abuse and contempt, because his Savior has suffered all this. He will not become fretful and discouraged when difficulties press him, because Jesus did not fail or become discouraged (2MCP 631).

He who has God for his friend and helper can afford to spend a long winter of chilling neglect, abuse, and persecution. By the grace which Christ imparts, he can maintain his faith and trust in God under the sorest trials. The triumph of Christian faith is to suffer, and be strong; to submit, and thus conquer (LP 300).

So the very first step is to connect with God every day so that Heaven's resources will be readily available to us when we need them most.

► Maintain secure daily connection

The second goal is to gain a healthy sense of our unique personhood. We are sons and daughters of God, princes and princesses in the Royal family of the universe. No amount of abuse can change this sublime fact. We are

the apple of His eye and He loves us with an everlasting, unfailing love. Nothing can happen to us without His permission. He cares for us as if we were the sole object of His loving concern.

► Wondrous love

He wants us to avoid the extreme of being too filled with self-importance, too sure of ourselves, too confident in our own abilities. On the other hand, He does not want us to devalue ourselves in our own eyes or give an impression to others that we feel inferior. He wants us to have a healthy, balanced sense of self, a clear understanding of who we are and of what we can be and do through His empowering grace.

► Mistaken sense of superiority

► Mistaken sense of inferiority

► Accurate sense of personal value

When we approach a difficult interpersonal situation with this strong sense of self-worth, we are better able to withstand the sharp attacks and stinging criticisms.

The third step is to pray for the person. We cannot know the history of hurts that has brought the person to a point of bitterness or the weight of burdens that press down on her heart. However, we may ask God to use our influence to lighten the load and cheer the spirits of the one that Satan is trying to overcome. With this sense of good will toward her in our minds, and with a desire to foster her best interests in our hearts, we can approach the conflict with a sense of peace and preparedness.

► Prayers for those who wish us harm

Purpose in your heart to achieve the following crucial goals during the difficult conversation.

1. **I will make my best effort to understand the other person's point**

► Understand well

of view. To achieve this you may need to use words and phrases like these:

“Could you help me understand that better?” “Could I check to see if I’m understanding you correctly?” (Then rephrase what has been said.) “I don’t think I’m understanding your meaning yet, could you say it another way?” “I want to be sure that I understand your point of view and I think you mean . . .”

In an ideal situation, both people share a high level of commitment to understand each other clearly, but most often this does not happen. So don’t expect that the other person will want to try to understand you. It is appropriate, however, to say, “May I ask that you try to see this from my point of view?” or “Could you tell me what you think I said?”

2. **I will try to ensure that we both have equal time to speak.** To ▶ Fair use of time
make this happen you could ask for an agreement about this at the start of the conversation, or you could say, “You’ve been speaking for a while now, could you let me have a turn?” or “I’ve been describing how I see it, but I’d like to hear your point of view.” You may need to be more insistent and say, “I feel that you are not giving me an opportunity to speak. Please listen to what I have to say.” or “I feel that whenever I try to say something you interrupt or cut me off. Could you please give me a few minutes to explain my position?” If the other person is not saying anything, you may need to say, “I feel that it’s very important for you to tell me what you think about this, yet you haven’t said much yet. Is there anything I can

do to make it easier for you to let me know what you're thinking?"

3. **I will be respectful of the other person's feelings.** It often happens that people get angry or upset when there is a difference of opinion. And when feelings are stirred up, little progress is made toward a resolution of the conflict.

► Respect and restraint

Be sure to maintain your own composure and don't allow the situation or the feelings of the other person to inflame your own emotions. Next, you need to respectfully acknowledge what the other person is feeling. "You feel frustrated when I disagree with you because you feel strongly that your way is best." "You feel hurt by my lack of support for your plan." "You feel upset because it appears to you as if I am trying to take advantage of your situation."

If the person is verbally abusive toward you, it is important to protect yourself by saying, "Please stop insulting me." "Your remarks are out of line." It's not O.K. for you to disrespect me in this way." "Can we move away from personal attack to a discussion of the main issues?" By standing up for yourself in this way, you signal that you will not allow the person to intimidate or belittle you. When a soldier slapped Him, "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:23) While there are situations where it is best to "turn the other cheek," there's no virtue in allowing people to "walk all over you" when an appropriately assertive response holds benefit for both parties.

4. **I will call for a break if the discussion gets stuck.** It is helpful to stop the conversation if emotional tensions get too high or if there is no progress. Calling a “time-out” should not be done to gain a strategic advantage over the other person. The purpose is to allow both individuals to cool down and reflect on what has happened, and to consider ways to resolve the issues. You could say, “I think I need to take a break to think this over.” “We don’t seem to be making much headway, so let’s come back and try again in half an hour.” “We need to stop and cool off. I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

► Time-out

Sometimes people will “walk away” and “slam the door” and “break off communications” for a period of time in order to exert pressure or control over you. Reacting indignantly or assuming an apologetic posture simply plays into this manipulative maneuver. Nor does it help to beg and plead with the person to come back and talk. Simply let him know that when he is ready you’d like to continue the conversation, and be nice to him while you wait. His pride may prevent him from taking the initiative to return, so after a reasonable time let him know that you would like to get back to the discussion whenever it’s convenient with him.

If both individuals feel free to call for a break when things are not going well, this lessens the pressure to “make this work now” and there is a greater likelihood that good progress will be made toward a solution later.

5. **I will focus on identifying and understanding the problem.** It’s

► Clear focus

amazing how often people end up arguing about who is right and who is wrong, instead of trying to work on the problem. Another time waster is when people jump around from one issue to the next without giving themselves the opportunity to resolve any of them. Sometimes so much of their energy goes into recalling a litany of hurts and offenses from the past that they have nothing left to invest in finding a resolution to today's issue. Still another divergence is when they argue about what was said instead of trying to understand what was meant. Here are some ways to eliminate distractions and focus on the issue. "Let's stop arguing about who is right and start looking for a solution." "We can make a list of all these things that we need to discuss, and come back to them later, but for now can we just talk about . . ." "I know that we have said and done things that have caused pain and heartache in the past, and I'm very sorry that those things happened, as I'm sure you are too. We do need to resolve each one of them and then let them go, but for now, can we focus on this one urgent matter?" "I can see that my words could be understood in a way that was not intended, but what I really meant was . . . Can we talk about that?" If both people can agree on about ten words that accurately describe the problem, they are more than half-way to the solution. It obviously requires a lot of effort to reach this goal because people typically view the issue from very different perspectives. With good will and determination, most people can identify the problem, though they may differ on particulars.

► Eliminate distractions

6. I will make my best effort to find an acceptable solution.

► Acceptable resolution

Whenever there are competing interests, mutually acceptable solutions are hard to find. In this scenario the problem is that two people can't agree on who gets to use their only car.

If the husband wants the car to go to a friend's house for the day and the wife wants the car to go shopping for the day, there are only four feasible solutions to their opposing preferences. He will have the car all day, he'll be happy and she'll be disappointed. She will have the car all day, she'll be happy and he'll be disappointed. Neither will have the car, and they'll both be disappointed. They'll compromise and each will have the car for part of the day. In this case, both are happy for one half of the day, and both are disappointed for the other half of the day.

Here are some ways to resolve this kind of situation. "I had the car last time, so you go ahead and use it today." "If I can have the car this time, you can have it next time." "Let's flip a coin to decide who gets the car." "In exchange for the use of the car today, I'll give you . . . , or I'll do . . . for you." "You go ahead and use the car, and instead of being disappointed I'll find something else to do that will make me happy."

7. I will lovingly confront when I believe a person is wrong. It's much easier to look the other way when someone needs to be corrected than to do the hard work of giving a reproof or rebuke. Yet, as Christian leaders, we have a duty to warn people of the perils of going astray.

► Compassionate concern

Jesus never purchased peace by compromise. His heart overflowed with love for the whole human race, but He was never indulgent to their sins. He was too much their friend to remain silent while they were pursuing a course that would ruin their souls (DA 356).

Speaking alone and in the spirit of Christ to the one who is in fault, will often remove the difficulty. Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment (GW 499).

Deep heart-searching is essential before we approach an erring sinner. We must be absolutely certain that we are not acting on human impulse or mechanically performing a duty required by policy. We must bow before God and ask Him to search us and try us and see if there is any beam in our own eye before we attempt to take the splinter out of our brother's eye.

We must earnestly pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit, that He will help us to recognize the golden moment when the person will be most receptive to our appeal. And we must ask for the right words and the right attitude so that we will give no needless offense to the one we are trying to help.

Loving Father, I need the strength of Jesus to withstand the attacks and criticism that threaten to unsettle me. I need the wisdom of Jesus to know how best to resolve the difficulties that arise in my interpersonal relationships. And I need the compassionate heart of Jesus that loves people well enough to face them with my concerns about their struggles and troubles. Please do Your good work in me to refashion and refine my character so that I can bring glory to your name, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

► Thorough preparation

► Abundant resources

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU LEARNED?

1. What inner preparation is needed before we engage in difficult conversations?
(pp. 63, 64)

2. List seven things that you can do to effectively manage difficult discussions. (pp. 66-69)

3. Reflect on other things that you can do that can make difficult conversations go smoothly.

Answers to the Test Questions on Page 71

1. A daily connection with God. An accurate sense of our worth. Sincere prayer for the person.

2. I will make my best effort to understand the other person's point of view.
I will try to ensure that we both have equal time to speak.
I will be respectful of the other person's feelings.
I will call for a break if the discussion gets stuck.
I will focus on identifying and understanding the problem.
I will make my best effort to find an acceptable solution.
I will lovingly confront when I believe a person is wrong.

3. Use a few well-chosen words to express your views, needs, and preferences.
Avoid using "fighting words" or language that stirs up strong feelings.
Identify and highlight areas of agreement.
Express genuine appreciation when the person says or does something well.
People may need to "blow off steam" before they can discuss constructively.
Don't take an attack on your ideas as an attack against you.
Sometimes the only reasonable outcome is to "agree to disagree."

CONCLUSION

As you worked your way through this syllabus, you probably recognized that some of your ways of speaking and acting need to be changed. The smallest improvement in your ways of communicating is far better than the grandest intention that never comes to fruition. So persevere in your efforts to develop your new habits.

One of the best ways to motivate yourself to persist in your program of self-improvement is to get regular feedback from someone whose opinions you respect. The insights they provide and the support they give will strengthen your resolve to press ahead.

There are many fine books and training materials available that can add to your understanding of good communication and spur you on as you work on your skills. Helpful though these are, remember to go to the Source of wisdom and inspiration and He will richly bless you in response to your requests.

The power of speech is a talent that should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God, none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer and praise to God, and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good.

By diligent effort all may acquire the power to read intelligibly, and to speak in a full, clear, round tone, in a distinct and impressive manner. By doing this we may greatly increase our efficiency as workers for Christ.

Let the word be so spoken that it will appeal to the understanding and impress the heart. Slowly, distinctly, and solemnly should it be spoken, yet with all the earnestness which its importance demands (COL 335, 336).

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