IMPOTRANCE OF EFFECTIVE ORAL COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC SPEAKING IN PRESENT SCENARIO

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Abstract: The paper explains the concept of effective's oral communications and the art of public speaking. It dwells on factors inhibiting the effective oral communications and explain the process of Information exchange in a company. Various factors such as oral communication skills and listening ability are elaborated this paper

Keywords: Effective oral communication, Public speaking

1.0 Introduction

In today's society, it is necessary for educated people to be able to present and discuss information with individuals and groups of people. According to a survey conducted in 2006 by the National Association of Colleges and employers, communication skills, both written and verbal, ranked as the most important personal quality that employers seek in an employee. The ability to logically and clearly present ones ideas is integral to success in almost any area of life.

Effective Oral Communication is a course designed to round out the triad of Critical Thinking and Effective Writing. The purpose of the Effective Oral Communication component of the Core curriculum at Kings College is to hone the speaking and presentational skills of each student. By the end of the course, students should be capable of delivering an effective speech relating to a specific topic, issue, or question from an academic discipline including subjects related to the Core curriculum and the students major field of study.

2.0 Factors Inhibiting Effective Oral Communication

There are several factors which impede proper oral communication between speaker and listener. Some of these are as follows:

2.1 Experience and Background differ between Speaker and Listener:

Everyone correlates what he hears or sees with his own experience To some people risk taking is a way of life. They thrive on it. However, risk taking may be against the sense of security of a person who has perhaps burnt his fingers once. Speaker might have been born in a very affluent family with high social standing. The listener might belong to a middle class family with conservative attitudes. Their backgrounds differ. Therefore, understanding differs. Both of them might be speaking English, but their wavelengths are altogether different and the two do not understand each other. Instead of hearing what people tell us, we hear only what our minds tell us.

2.2 We fail to convey the information the listener needs and can understand:

For example, a manager may feed a subordinate's mind with information he is not ready to grasp. For example, if suddenly a manager instructs a subordinate about detailed techniques of planning, he will not be able to understand anything unless he already knows the basics of the planning process. Similarly, if someone spoke of computers to a person who had no knowledge whatsoever of computers, the result will be a blank look.
It is also a manager's job to make sure that he gets from his subordinates the information he actually needs. If the subordinate does not know what the manager needs, he either deluges him with all available information leaving the manager to sift out what he wants, or else does not give him any information at all.

2.3 Our stereotypes and beliefs influence what we hear:

For example, a man with a strong prejudice gets some information that contradicts it. His tendency will be to twist the information so that it supports rather than negates his prejudice. To cite a case: 'A' is a good office worker but hates outdoor work. For his career progression, his manager makes him a salesman. 'A' sees this

benevolent act to be a punishment for him. He hates the work, so he is sure he will fail there. He thinks the manager knows this and is acting to purposefully ruin his career.

2.4 Our emotional state of mind colours what we hear:

A worried, fearful employee finds a threat in everything he hears. Fear filters quite a lot of communication. We attach meanings which just do not exist. Similarly, other emotions like hatred or love colour information that we receive.

2.5 Often we discredit a speaker's message because we suspect his motivation:
The classic example of this barrier is to be found in labour-management relations. Many union members are convinced that the management is anti-labour, and refuse to believe anything that the management tells them. Similarly, the management feels that grievances are political manoeuvres designed to win union votes. Because of such close-minded attitudes, it is impossible for each side to make itself properly understood.

2.6 We fail to evaluate the meaning behind what we hear:
Sometimes, we go to the opposite extreme instead of judging what we hear by the speaker's imagined motivation, we completely ignore the possible latent meanings of his words. We often tend to forget that most statements are a combination of facts and feelings. For example a worker who often complains that his machine has broken down, perhaps does not like his work; letting his machine break- down, is perhpas a good way to communicate his feelings,

2.7 Often, what we say has symbolic meanings for others:
What we say has often far greater meaning than what appears on the surface. That is why one often gets surprisingly strong reactions to what one considers a very mild statement. For example, a management announces the introduction of Electronic Bank Ledger Posting but it is understood by the bank union as a prelude to declaring people surplus, or the blocking of promotion avenues and so on.

2.8 Words have different meanings for different people:
The speaker and listener interpret words differently. In fact, as years progress, words themselves come to have different meanings. To cite an example, "automobile" means a "self-propelled vehicle" but we know it does not include a scooter or a farm tractor. If one says: "moral," another may ask if dancing, drinking, smoking, or eating beef is moral. Catholics feel birth control is not moral, Is the breaking of a prohibition law moral? If we look at a dictionary we would be amazed at the many meanings common words have. For example, the word "cat" has nine meanings all different.

The problem then arises as to whether the listener has understood the words in the same way as the speaker. For example, if 'A' tells 'B' : "Do it as soon as you can", does it mean now, after an hour, when 'B' is free, after 5 days, or what?

2.9 Our reference group often dictates the way we hear a message:
We often identify ourselves as a group and this tends to shape our opinions on many matters. For example, maintenance men generally think that the machine workers do not handle machines properly and this causes more breakdowns, The workers think that breakdowns occur because of sloppy maintenance. Many strong feelings are generated because of imagined slights.

2.10 Tendency to Evaluate:
The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve (or disapprove) the statement of the other person, Although the tendency to make evaluation is common in ali interchange of language, it is very much heightened in those situations where feelings and emotions are deeply involved. So, the stronger our feelings, the more likely it is that there will be no common element in the communication. There will be just two ideas, two feelings, two judgements, bypassing each other due to emotional barriers.

This tendency to react to any emotionally charged statement by forming an evaluation of it from our own point of view is a major barrier to interpersonal communication.

3.0 Problems in Oral Communication

All oral communication problems can be broadly divided into three groups:
- The physical problem of how accurately the message can be transmitted.
- The semantic problem of how the message conveys the desired meaning.
- The psychological problem of how meaning affects the desired results.

3.1 Physical Problem: The physical process of passing a message may be disrupted or distorted by difficulties. For example, a person may be stutter and make a spoken word difficult to follow, or a teleprompter machine may be defective and cause a scrambling of the message. The concept of 'noise' in communications engineering includes these undesirable uncertainties in the transmission process. The 'transmission loss' may be due to defects in the transmitter and the receiver, and other external factors like distance, atmospheric disturbances etc. Because all transmission of message is subject to the 'loss of information' through 'noise' the sender of a message should always be conscious of the need for 'redundancy' (extra information or repetition that makes the transmission more certain and predictable), and the minimisation of the number of times that the message is to be transmitted.

3.2 Semantic Problem: Language may be defined as any systematic body of signs, symbols or signals that can be used to transmit meaning from one person to another. Communication which has to use the instrument of language is, therefore, the word 'round' has 89 different meanings. Words are but empty vessels in which meanings are poured by the sender and the receiver. This is a matter of semantics. Securing understanding of a message is affected by a number of factors.

- The similarity of past experience of the sender and the receiver.
- The environment in which the communication take place.
- The distribution between facts and opinions.
- The degree of abstractness of the symbols used.
- The complexity of the phrases used.

3.3 Psychological Problem: Acceptance of a communication by the receiver is a psychological phenomenon depending on the needs of the receiver, his past experience, and the environment in which the communication takes place. This is a problem of perception. Some of the factors that lead to differences in perception between individuals and groups can be categorised as follows:

- Sensory factors : differences in the ability to hear, see, taste, smell and feel
- Age
- Sex
- Educational levels
- Economic level
- Regional differences
- Religious and other loyalties
- Organisational interests
- Personality factors.

A person tends to hear what he wants to hear and to reject what he does not want to hear. He will accept a communication if it does not seriously conflict with his own goals. Usually, a person has a broad "zone of acceptance" and will accept communication even if he does not agree with the entire message. If he feels that he is part of a well-developed working team, he will tend to accept many communications without consciously questioning them.

4.0 Gateways to More Effective Communication

4.1 Listening with Understanding: As was stated earlier, the evaluative tendency is one of the biggest barriers to understanding. Real communication occurs when this evaluative tendency is avoided, and we listen with understanding. What does that mean? It means, to view the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him, and to grasp his frame of reference in regard to the thing he is talking about. It is a more effective way of improving interpersonal relationship and communication with others. If a person can listen to what the other person is trying to say, if he can understand how it seems to the other person, and can sense the emotional tone which it has for the other person, then it would help in the communication process.

Listening with understanding means to understand the other person's thoughts and feelings so well that you could summarise them for him. You will find that with the emotions eliminated the discussions, the differences would be reduced; and, the differences which remain will be of a rational and understandable type.

When the concerned persons realise that they are being understood, that someone sees how the situation seems to them, the statements grow less exaggerated and less defensive; and, it will no longer be necessary for them to maintain the attitude, "I am 100% right and the other person 100% wrong". The influence of such understanding, even in the antagonistic group, permits the members to come closer to the objective truth involved in the discussion. In this way, mutual communication is established, and some type of agreement becomes much more probable.

The essence of communication is to increase the amount of listening with understanding, and decrease the amount of evaluation.

We want to achieve a genuine understanding of the other person's views and, even more important, of his attitudes and feelings towards a particular subject.

The following are some guides to effective listening:
- Stop talking. Stop the mental chatter and stop the mental answering back. Let the speaker finish. Hear him out fully.
- Try to understand the speaker, not to vanquish him.
- Not only listen but also seem to be listening.
- Try to keep prejudices to the minimum.
- Listen with feeling, with compassion and with patience.

4.2 Understanding Each Other's Point of View: Good communication can be achieved by creating a situation in which each of the different parties comes to understand the other from the other's point of view. This has been achieved in practice, even when feelings run high, by the influence of a person who is willing to understand each point of view emphatically, and who, thus, acts as a moderator to bring about further understanding. This procedure has an important characteristic. It can be initiated by a third person provided he can gain cooperation of the parties.

This procedure can deal with the defensive exaggerations, and the false fronts which characterise almost every failure in communication. These defensive distortions drop away rapidly as people find that the only intent is to understand and not to judge.

Mutual communication tends to be pointed towards solving a problem rather than towards attacking a person or a member of the group. It leads to a situation in which a person sees how the problem appears to the other person as well as to him. Thus, accurately and realistically defined, the problem is almost certain to yield to intelligent understanding.

4.3 Before you Communicate Something put Yourself in your Listener's Shoes: Think how he may react to your message and what you should do to be sure he understands it the way you mean it. Look at the problem from his angle, keeping in mind his constraints, difficulties, strengths etc.

4.4 Timing of Communication: Timing of Communication is very important. Once a wrong impression is formed in people's mind, it might be a very difficult task to erase or dislodge it even with facts. The answer is to get the facts across, before misconceptions have a chance to gain a foothold.

4.5 Sincerity: Sincerity is an important factor in communication. Anything that is said should be supported by action. When something happens that is contradictory to what has been said by a manager, he should give a full explanation.

4.6 Freshness: Time-worn, over familiar phrases tend to be ignored by the subordinates. They think that they have heard this before, and perhaps their experience tells them that not much importance needs to be attached to these words.

5.0 Executive's Guide to Oral Communication

Is your presentation style attractive?
Have you been courteous in greeting the audience?
Is your voice level loud and clear?
Have you talked directly to your audience?
Is your message interesting to the audience?
Have you broken your speech in coherent and logical sections?
Have you used simple words in you talk? Have you used a positive tone ?

6.0 Principles of Information Exchange in a Company

There are seven basic principles:
- It is a manager's duty to tell his subordinates all that they need to know to carry out their tasks with the maximum effectiveness.
- To obtain the fullest commitment to the objectives of their enterprise, employees must be told as soon as possible about all matters that effect them directly; and, quickly of selected matters that affect them less directly and indeed, not at all of those matters that are irrelevant to their circumstances.

- It is a manager's duty to see that his group understands his message, if necessary, by discussion until it is understood.
- Information flow and exchange must be planned if it is to be effective.
- Paper should be used for facts, but word of mouth is better medium for persuasion
- While planned face-to-face information flow with feedback remains the mere effective vehicle for 89maintain good industrial relations. Supporting media can improve effectiveness provided that such media are justified by, and appropriate to, the immediate situation.
- It is a manager's duty to take every feasible step not to use the grapevine, and never, repeat never, to try to make use of it, even by an inspired leak. For the use of rapine almost always imputes evil motives even to the most benevolent actions.

7.0 Oral Communication Skills

"The man who can think and does not know how to express what he thinks is at the level of him who cannot think".

Dr Paul Rankin of the Ohio State University is of the view: "People are spending 85% of their working time in communication. Of this:
- 9 % in writing
- 16 % in reading
- 30 % in speaking, and
- 45 % in listening

Three important factors in oral communication process are:
- The speaker
- How he speaks
- What he speaks

Developing the speaking skill:
- Have a sense of urgency, since audience 'has little time to waste
- Have a clear understanding of the benefits
- Appreciate the basic principles of oral communication and have sufficient practice based on these principles
- Form positive habits while addressing an audience
- Engage in continuous self-development as a speaker

8.0 Logical Approach to Effective Speaking:

Determine the purpose ate
- To stimulate (inspiration emotional arousal)
- To convince (belief intellectual agreement)
- To perceive (definite observable action)
- To inform (clear understanding)
- To entertain (interest and enjoyment)

Analyze the audience and the occasion
- Audience (size, age, sex, education, occupation, knowledge of subject,attitudes, primary interests, and desires)
- Occasion (purpose of gathering, rules and customs, what will precede or follow, physical conditions).

Selection of subject
- A subject the speaker knows
- A subject that is interesting to the speaker
- A subject that it interesting to the audience
- A subject that can be adequately covered within the allotted time

Gathering the materials required for speech
- Personal experience
- Interviews
- Printed materials
- Letters and questionnaires
- Broadcast etc.

Personality of the speaker
- Being alive to the situation
- Being enthusiastic
- Acting confident

- Being properly attired
- Being pleasant
- Having poise

Performance
- Relaxation (physical, mental)
- Rhythm (emphasis, accent/pitch, rate, and pause)
- A direct approach to the audience
- A sense of communication
- Being conversational
- Using one's individuality
- Sincerity, earnestness and enthusiasm

9.0 Listening Ability

The construction of oral and written messages is only one part of the communication process. The best message is of little avail unless the person at the receiving end listens to it or reads it and makes an effort to understand it. We often speak without listeners and speak when we ought to be listening. And we frequently fail to find readers for the avalanche of words that make up the memoranda, letters and reports of the organisational world. A partial solution is to speak less and say more, and to write shorter, fewer, and better messages. But a great deal more attention should also be given to the development of listening and reading skills.

Listening requires as much, if not more, mental effort and concentration than speaking.
Effective listening involves more than hearing the words spoken by another person. The listener should look beyond the words for the meaning and sentiments the speaker is attempting to convey.

9.1 Problems in Listening

- A major barrier to effective listening is the tendency of the listener to evaluate in terms of his, rather than the speaker's, frame of reference. The listener's prejudices and beliefs cued by the words or the person of the speaker, partially or completely, inhibit any exchange of information between the two parties. Each party is essentially talking to and about himself rather than to the other person.
- Most people can think a great deal faster than a person can speak. The mind often wanders too far and loses the speaker completely. A good listener does not let his mind drift away from what the speaker has to say.
- People sometimes listen for words rather than ideas and may even attempt to memorize the specific sequences of words used by the speaker.
- People may reduce their listening capacity by taking detailed notes. A better approach is to listen carefully and then write down only the leading ideas.
- A bad listener may rationalise his habit and express some reasons for not listening, but they are often used to soothe the conscience of the lazy listener.
- Pseudo-listeners make the speaker believe that they are listening or have listened. An eager and intense look, and a periodic comment or a question, is the usual technique.

9.2 Guide to Effective Listening

- Listen patiently to what the other person has to say even though you may believe it to be wrong or irrelevant. Indicate simple acceptance (not necessarily agreement) nodding your head or perhaps interjecting an occasional "
- Try to understand the feelings the person is expressing as well as the intellectual content. Most of us have difficulty talking clearly about our feelings. So careful attention is required.
- Restate the person's feelings, briefly but accurately. At this stage, you simply serve as a mirror, and encourage the other person to continue talking. Occasionally, make summary responses such as you think you are in a dead-end job, but in doing so, keep your tone neutral and try not to lead the person to your pet conclusions.
- Allow time for the discussion to continue without interruption and try to separate the conversation from mere official communication of company plans. That is, do not make the conversation any more "authoritative" than it already is by virtue of your position in the organisation.
- Avoid direct questions and arguments about facts, refrain from saying, "That is just not so," "Hold on a minute, let's look at the facts," or "Prove it." You may want to review the evidence later, but a review is irrelevant to how the person feels now.
- When the other person does touch upon a point you do want to know more about, simply repeat statements as a question. For instance, if he remarks, 'Nobody can break even on his expense account',

you can probe by replying, "You say no one breaks even on expenses?" With this encouragement he will probably expand on his previous statement.

- Listen for what is not said evasions for pertinent points or perhaps too ready agreement with common clichés. Such an omission may be a clue to a bothersome fact the person wishes was not true.
- If the other person appears genuinely to want your viewpoint, be honest in your reply. But at the listening stage try to limit the expression of your views, since these may condition or repress what the other person says.
- Don't get emotionally involved yourself. Try simply to understand first and defer evaluation until later.
- Listen "between the lines." A person does not always put everything that is important into words. The changing tones and volume of his voice may have a meaning. So may his facial expression, the gestures he makes with his hands and the movements of his body.
- Better results can be achieved if the superior gives less emphasis to explaining and more emphasis to listening.

10.0 Commandments of Good Oral Communication

As a manager, your prime responsibility is to get things done through people. However sound your ideas or well-reasoned your decisions, they become effective only as they are transmitted to others and achieve the desired action or reaction. Communication, therefore, is our most vital management tool. On the job you communicate not only with words but also through your apparent attitudes and your actions. For communication encompasses all human behaviour that results in an exchange of meaning. How well you manage depends upon how well you communicate in this broad sense. These Ten Commandments are designed to help you improve your skill as a manager by improving your skill of communication with your superiors, subordinates and associates.

10.1 Seek to clarify your ideas before communicating: The more systematically we analyse ideas to be communicated, the clearer they become. This is the first step toward effective communication. Many communications fail because of inadequate planning. Good planning must consider the goals and attitudes of those who will receive the communication and those who will be affected by it.

10.2 Examine the true purpose of each communication: Before you communicate, ask yourself what you really want to accomplish with your message obtain information, initiate action, change another person's attitude? Identify your most important goal and then adapt your language, tone, and total approach to serve that specific objective. Do not try to accomplish too much with each communication. The sharper the focus of your message the greater is its chances of success.

10.3 Consider the total physical and human setting whenever you communicate: Meaning and intent are conveyed by more than words alone. Many other factors influence the overall impact of a communication, and the manager must be sensitive to the total setting in which he communicates. Consider, for example, your sense of timing i.e., the circumstances under which you make an announcement or render a decision; the physical setting whether you communicate in private, for example, or otherwise; the social climate that pervades work relationships within the company or a department sets the tone of its communications; custom and past practice the degree to which your communication conforms to, or departs from, the expectations of your audience. Be constantly aware of the total setting in which you communicate. Like all living things, communication must be capable of adapting itself to its environment.

10.4 Consult with others, where appropriate, in planning communication
Frequently, it is desirable or necessary to seek the participation of others in planning a communication or developing the facts on which to base it. Such consultation often helps in lending additional insight and objectivity to your message. Moreover, those who have helped you plan your communication will give it their active support.

10.5 Be mindful, while you communicate, of the overtones as well as the basic content of your message

Your tone of voice, your expression, your apparent receptiveness to the responses of others all have a tremendous impact on those you wish to achieve. Overlooking of these subtleties of communication after affect a listener's reaction to a message even more than its basic content. Similarly, your choice of language particularly your awareness of the fine shades of meaning and emotion in the words you use predetermine in large part the reaction of your listeners.

10.6 Take the opportunity, when it arises, to convey something of help or value to the receiver

Consideration of the other person's interests and needs, the habit of trying to look at things from his point of view, will frequently point up opportunities of conveying something of immediate benefit, or long range value, to him. People on the job are most responsive to the manager whose messages take their own interests into account.

10.7 Follow up your communication

Our best efforts at communication may be wasted and we may never know whether we have succeeded in expressing our true meaning and intent, if we do not follow to see how well we have succeeded in putting our message across. This you can do by asking questions, by encouraging the receiver to express his reactions, by follow up contacts, and by a subsequent review of performance. Make certain that every important communication has "a feedback" so that complete understanding and appropriate action result.

10.8 Communicate for tomorrow as well as today:
While communications may be aimed primarily at meeting the demands of an immediate situation, they must be planned with the past in mind, if they are to maintain consistency in the receiver's view; most important of all, they must be consistent with long range interests and goals. For example, it is not easy to communicate frankly on such matters as poor performance or the shortcomings of a loyal subordinate but postponing disagreeable communications make it more difficult in the long-run, and is actually unfair to your subordinates and your company.

10.11 Be sure your actions support your communication:
In the final analysis, the most persuasive kind of communication is not what you say but what you do. When a man's actions or attitudes contradict his words, we tend to discount what he has said. For every manager, this means that good supervisory practices such as clear assignment of responsibility and authority, fair rewards for effort, and sound policy enforcement serve to communicate more than all the gifts or oratory.

10.12 Last but by no means least:
Seek not only to be understood but also understand to be a good listener. When we start talking we often cease to listen in that larger sense of being attuned to the other person's unspoken reactions and attitudes. Even more serious is the fact that we are all guilty, at times, of inattentiveness when others are attempting to communicate to us. Listening is one of the most important, most difficult and most neglected skills in communication, it demands that we concentrate not only on the explicit meanings, but also unspoken words and under stones that may be far more significant. Thus we must learn to listen with the inner ear if we are to know the inner man.

11.0 Conclusion:

In this rather comprehensive paper various factors that help or inhibit verbal communication are discussed. It also discusses oral communication skills in detail. The paper is rounded up with commandments for effective verbal communications.

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