



Communication Skills:

A 4 module E-Course

I have put together a course you can do with just email, on "Communication Skills". This course contains some basic and some advanced communication skills. There is theory on tried and trusted communication techniques used in the workplace as well as counselling situations, and lots of opportunity to practice your communication so you can become highly skilled in communicating in many different types of situations.

- You can do the work for the course in your **own time and own place**. You can **take as long as you** like to complete the course – there is no deadline. Most people finish the course within 4-8 weeks working about 3 hours a week on the course material. You are welcome to email me any questions, comments, answers you want, etc, while you are doing the course.
- I send you all the material via email – all course material, exercises, practice sessions etc. The workbooks are yours to keep on completion of the course.
- There is a **certificate** for completion of the course.

You need to register and pay before starting the course.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

One of the most important things you or I will ever do is communicate. Communicating is the way we start and maintain (and maybe even end) all our relationships in the work environment, in our personal lives, and in fact in any sphere of life. Without good communication skills you get nowhere. With excellent communication skills you can go far in life.

- If you want to be a good leader, you will never be one unless you can communicate well in all sorts of situations, including the really challenging ones
- If you want a good intimate relationship with your partner, it is not going to happen in the long term unless you are very good at communicating.
- If you want a happy family you need to be good at communicating.
- If you want your business to prosper, your staff to deliver, and your customers to be happy, you need to be great at communicating.

The outline of the 4 module programme is as follows:

Module 1: Looking at how you have learned to communicate. Understanding your current communication patterns. Understanding the communication patterns of those around you. Looking at what works and what does not work in your current communication patterns.

Module 2: Understanding how different people interpret the world in different ways. Understanding how our views of the world influence our communication – what we say and what we hear. Understanding the influence of our beliefs and values on interpreting communication. Understanding how we make assumptions in communication. Learning to stop making assumptions and really understand what is being said. In this module we also look at some general pointers around poor communication – such as – passive-aggressive, put-downs, hostile, defensive, scapegoating, blaming, diversion, and dictatorial communication – and discuss how to improve it.

Module 3: This module is about learning crucial techniques. Three listening techniques are covered and three self-expression techniques are covered. The listening techniques are: 1) The Disarming Method, 2) Feeling and Thought Empathy Method, 3) Inquiry. The three self-expression techniques are: 1) "I feel" statements Method, 2) Behavioural

Change Requests, 3) Stroking. There is lots of opportunity for you to practice using these techniques in your own real life situations.

Module 4: In this last module we look at handling communication in challenging situations when the other party is: In Conflict; Passive-Aggressive; Aggressive, Hostile or sarcastic; Stubborn and argumentative; Critical and judgemental; Demanding; and Constantly complaining.

Contact: penny.holburn@live.co.za for more information or to book for the course.

Below are 12 pages of extracts from the course so you can see what the course material is like, get a feel for the course and decide if you want to do the course. The full course material is about 90 pages – each module around 20 pages.

Extracts from the Course

Communication Skills Course

This course is about learning the skills to communicate well with others. It can be communication in a one-to-one situation or group situation, a peaceful situation or even a conflict situation. It can be communication in an intimate relationship or communication with a colleague or boss at work.

Module 1: Understanding your Communication Patterns

Why would you want to be good at communication?

I hope as you read this heading above you are thinking to yourself, “Now why would she even ask such a silly question”. For as long as you are alive, you are going to have a much better life if you are good at

communicating. If you are going to have any interaction with people you need to be able to communicate. As humans, communication is how we get things done.

- If you want to be a leader or manager of any group of people you need to know how to communicate well. How else will you let people know of your vision? How else will you inform others of the company's goals? What will you do when staff don't do the right thing? How do you let them know to get back on track? How will you motivate people if you can't communicate? In fact, if you are a leader then communication skills are vital for you to do your job well.
- In any personal relationship, poor communication skills will only exacerbate any problems and hamper their resolution. In your personal relationships how do you let others know of your needs and wants without communication? How do you express unhappiness with something unless you can communicate? Conflict resolution is only possible with good communication skills. How do you let someone know you care about them without communication skills?
- If you need to sell or influence people you need good communication skills. Good communication skills include how to understand and really identify with people and their needs. Good communication skills allow you to persuade others. Good communication skills allow you to really and truly hear what someone is trying to tell you they need. Whether you are selling yourself at a job interview or selling products for your boss or yourself to meet your performance targets, you need good communication skills to sell successfully.

Learned Communication Patterns

You already have learned how to communicate. It may be effective or it may not be effective. The point is that you are reading this already having done a lot of communication. You have watched others communicate and learned from them. You have received feedback from others on your communication (directly or indirectly) and you may have modified some of your communication habits based on this feedback. You already have many established habits around how you communicate.

Think about yourself. You grew up in a specific environment. It could have been poor, it could have been middle class, or you may have grown up in a wealthy family. You may have been born into poverty and later on your family became wealthy. The opposite could also have occurred. Your family had members with

specific education levels. Learning and training may have been emphasised in your family or not. You may have been encouraged to express your opinions and feelings or you may have been punished for doing so. You may have grown up with the belief that, “children should be seen and not heard”. Maybe in your life you have only seen conflict resolved with anger and rage. Maybe you never experienced much conflict in your family because no one had any idea what to do with different ideas, so the opinion of the eldest male was the one that mattered. Whatever your situation it had an impact on how you learned to communicate. It also had an impact on what you communicated.

When you were born you grew up most probably with your family. It may have been the traditional mother and father type family, it may have been a single parent family, it may have been an older sibling who raised you because your parents and other older adults were not around to take care of you. In whatever type of “family” environment you were raised there was communication. And you listened to and learned to communicate according to the way others in the family communicated.

When you went to playschool (if you did) and later on school you came across more people whom you could listen to and communicate with. And you added to your learnings about how and when to communicate. You learned from watching other people communicate. You learned from the responses you got to your communications. If someone asked for something and was ignored, you learned that it didn’t help to ask for something, no one would listen.

Emotions became associated with communication as you grew up. If lots of emotions, such as anger, fury, etc. were shown when communication took place, you learned that communication was typically accompanied by a lot of emotions. The emotions used when communicating were also aspects of communication that you learned.

Then you left school, may have completed further studies and started working. In the workplace you learned some more about communication. Some of it may have reinforced what you already knew and some of it may have been different to what you had experienced before. But all through your life, and even today, you continue to learn about communication: What to say? How to say it. What works? What makes people upset? What words produce what reactions?

If you are reading this then you will have been exposed to and absorbed a lot about communication and how to communicate. Anyone who can read has probably spent a lot of years on this planet engaged in or observing communication. Unless you have received quite a lot of feedback about your communication from others, or you have done quite a bit of introspection, you probably are somewhat unaware of exactly how you communicate, how others perceive your communication, and what you could do to improve it.

And so, what I want you to realise is that today, when you are communicating, you are reflecting back in your communication what you have been exposed to, learned, and taken on yourself as the best way you know how to communicate. If you have never been exposed to good communication then you cannot possibly be expected to be a great communicator. After all communication skills are learned, you are not born with them. You are born with the ability to use language, but that is not communication. And many of your habitual ways of communicating will be those which you learned very young in life, which you may not even be consciously aware of. In fact every relationship we have usually reflects our first relationships in life, so unless you have done quite a bit of work, you most probably still respond to others in much the same way you did to your parents/caregivers.

Another important point I want to highlight is that we talk about communication skills. Skills means this is something you can learn. Don't throw up your hands in despair after another argument, or another episode where you have been misunderstood, and give up. These are skills and you can learn skills. Almost anyone can learn skills. So you can learn to be a great communicator. And the advantage of being a great communicator is that you will be noticed and you will be influential. And so you will go places.

Exercise

I want you to think about some of the ways in which communication took place in your home when you were young. Ask yourself these questions as prompts, and then write down some general notes about the communication in your family.

- Did communication happen? That is did people talk about what was happening or was it more the case of people being silent?

- What sort of things did people talk about in your family?
 - Superficial things (things that did not require them to expose much of their true feelings and self)
 - What they wanted and needed
 - Their feelings
 - Their accomplishments
 - Other people

- How good were the listening skills in your family?
 - Do you feel you were listened to?
 - What if anything, would get listened to?
 - What would not get listened to?

- Did you feel understood when you tried to communicate?

- Were people very emotional when communicating?
 - Was communication full of anger or rage?
 - Was it tearful communication?
 - Was communication quite manipulative?

- Did you enjoy communicating with your family?

- Was there a good outcome? In other words, did the communication result in achieving the objectives you wanted met or was everyone left feeling frustrated and that nothing had been achieved?

- Why do you think that was?

- Did you dread communicating with your family?

- Do you still dread communicating with your family? Why?

Now I want you to think about communication at school, tertiary institutions, amongst peers and their families, and the media. Using the same headings as above, write down how you experienced communication. We are looking at communication as you experienced it outside of your direct family during your years of education. So you will think about whether you were heard or not. What sort of things were communicated. How easy it was to communicate. The emotion in communications. Whether communications were effective or not.

Now write down how you have experienced communication in your adult working life.

Based on everything you have thought about thus far, as well as written down, you are now going to write down how you think you communicate. What are your communication patterns? You can use your own words for this. You don't have to use formal terms or think of names for actual ways of communicating. Just write down in your own words the way in which you communicate.

Below are some examples (these are not necessarily yours so only pick from this list if they apply to you). And then add your own.

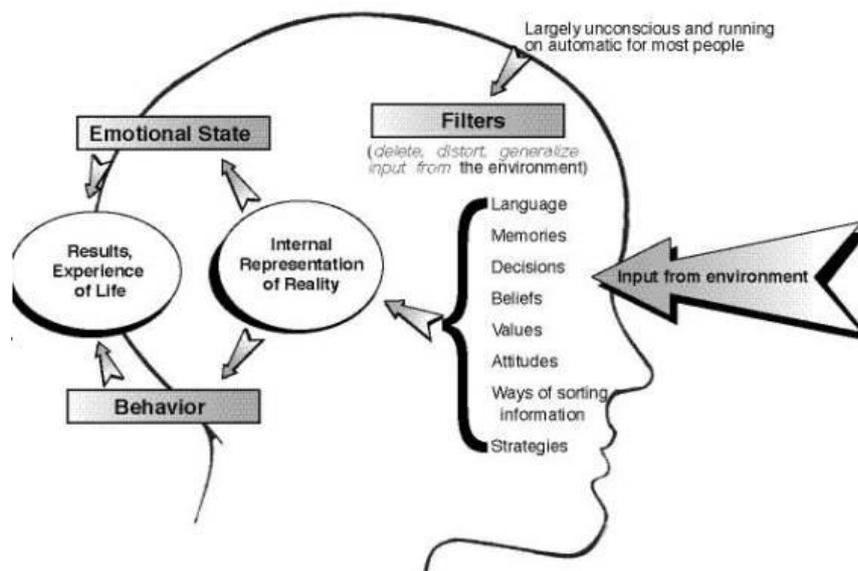
- I am a poor listener. I never really hear what people are saying.
- I never discuss my feelings. I hate talking about what I feel.
- It is impossible for me to express my needs and wants.

- When other people scream at me I am terrified and forget what I wanted to say.
- I don't believe other people will want to listen to what I have to say.
- I stutter and stammer over my words.
- When I talk to other people I am convinced they will only hear me if I shout at them.
- Other people tell me I talk loudly and shout.
- When someone tells me something I don't want to hear I get into a rage.
- People never communicate with me or tell me what is going on around me.
- I am so concerned about what others may think that I never end up saying exactly what I want to say.
- I dread talking to people.
- I don't seem to be able to put into words what I want to say.
- Others just don't seem to be able to get my message.
- I assume others will always understand what I say.
- I communicate whenever I feel the need to.
- I have no problem in communicating.
- I hide away if I think people are coming to talk to me.
- When others ask me something I feel like I have to agree with them.
- I find I never ask for what I want and need.
- I overreact to small things.
- I don't know how to ask for what I want and need.
- It is pointless asking for what I need because no one cares.
- There is no reason for me to ask for what I want because I am never going to get it anyway.
- When someone has done something that upsets me the first thing I do is yell at them.
- When I am upset I don't listen to the other person, I am too busy screaming and shouting at them.
- It is impossible for me to listen to what someone has to say without getting defensive.
- If I feel that someone is making me out to be wrong, I lose it.
- I cannot listen to anyone unless I have got off my chest what I need to say.
- I believe when I communicate what I say is always the right thing.
- I am not good at listening to points of view that differ from mine.
- If someone has upset me I don't even hear them out, I just get mad and shout at them.
- I am scared of communicating with authority figures.
- I avoid communicating with others as much as possible.
- I have no idea what to do in a conflict situation so I say nothing.
- When someone disagrees with me I keep quiet.

Our view of the world

We all have a personal frame of reference that consists of our attitudes, assumptions and expectations concerning ourselves, other people and life. We have a personal frame of reference from which we view the world and all that goes on in it.

Examine the diagram below.



Starting from the right of the diagram. Words spoken by others reach our senses – ears mostly, but we also use our eyes to determine non-verbal communication. As the words (the stimuli) enter our ears the stimuli are sent to the brain. Here there are a number of filters which operate. Mostly we are not consciously aware of these filters. Without even thinking we start interpreting the words we hear (stimuli) according to our filters – that is according to our language, memories, beliefs, values, attitudes etc. Our beliefs, our language, our cultural environment, the way we were socialised growing up and all our past experiences among other things, influence our interpretation of the words we hear. So two people can hear the same words and give a very different interpretation to what they heard.

We don't see the world as it is. We see it as we are. When we take in information, we interpret what is coming in. It is in our interpretation that we assign our own meaning to the information. And we interpret that information according to how we see the world. It is not only our patterns of communication that influence how we communicate, it is also how we interpret the topics of conversation.

The more someone communicating with us has similar beliefs, experiences, language and acculturation the more likely we are to interpret words and sentences similarly to them. When these differ considerably we can each have very different meanings for the same sentences.

This is quite complex. So often when we are communicating we focus on two aspects: Values and Beliefs. These cover a lot of the filters.

Our values determine what we pay attention to. If we value something we pay more attention to it. If we don't value something we may ignore or not listen to it. When you overhear a conversation and something important to you gets mentioned, such as whether they are going to retrench your department or not, you will pay attention to it if you value your job. If you overhear a topic you don't really care much about, you will usually not tune into that conversation. We tune into and focus on communication that is important to us. So our values help us decide how important information communicated is and whether we want to listen to it or not. This is used a lot in persuading and influencing. If you know what someone values you can get them to pay attention to you and you can influence their thinking.

Our beliefs guide how we interpret what we hear. If you have a belief that finding a job is impossible and you are too old for job hunting (note this is a belief not a fact) then you will become scared and fearful hearing the news that your department is about to be retrenched. If you believe it is easy for you to get another job and in fact this current one is so awful that you would be better off out of the company, the news is going to be less scary and threatening to you.

Have a look at the example below:

EXAMPLE: A woman phones her boyfriend to tell him she has to work over the weekend.



“My boss gave me a deadline to get this presentation out for this important new client they are trying to bring on board and so I will have to be in the office the whole weekend. Which means I won’t be able to come and visit you this weekend.”

Firstly, in order to pay attention to the message the information must be something that is valuable to us. In this instance the woman is telling her boyfriend that she has a deadline at work and will not be able to come and visit him for the weekend. If he did not value the relationship it would not matter that much to him. He does in this instance value her visits over the weekend and so her news is very important and he pays a lot of attention to it. So the first filter it goes through is his **values**.

“She doesn’t want to spend time with me this weekend. She doesn’t think I am important. Our relationship is not important to her.



This is what he thinks to himself based on what she said to him. This is his values filter operating and influencing his interpretation of her words.

After the message has passed through the values filter, it moves on to be impacted by his **beliefs**. He hears the message according to his beliefs about the world. His beliefs include: *The relationship comes first, before work or anything else*. This belief means that he will put the relationship before work. We all assume that others have similar values and beliefs. So he takes her message to mean that the relationship is not important to her. If it was, he thinks, she would put the relationship above work. Her message has been interpreted by him to mean that the relationship doesn’t matter to her. Which is not what she said. She said that she has to work the whole weekend. His belief, however, (one of his filters through which he interprets the message he hears) is that relationships come first. So he takes her message and his mind interprets this as the relationship is not important to her.

“That must mean she doesn’t love me. I wonder if she has found someone else.”



Thoughts tend to feed off one another. So the thought he has that the relationship doesn’t matter to her triggers off another thought, namely, she doesn’t love me. And that can trigger off another thought. Has she found someone else?

Based on his filters, he now believes the relationship is not important to her and he starts questioning if she even loves him anymore. And as is often the case with negative thoughts, they can start a whole chain reaction of even more negative and self-defeating thoughts.

However, the conclusion he came to was based on his filters – his values and beliefs. He interpreted her communication to be that the relationship was not important to her. Which is not at all what she actually said to him. All she told him was that she had to work over the weekend. This example shows how our filters – values and beliefs - impact our interpretation of what is said to us and can cause a lot of misunderstandings in communication.