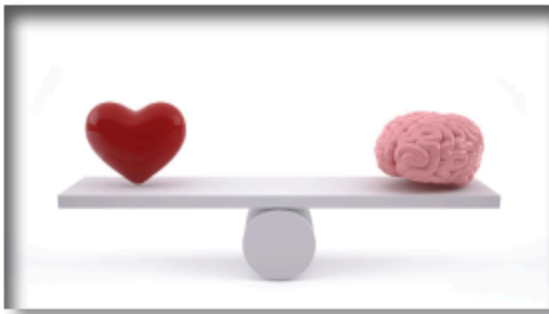


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I will pay more for the ability to deal with people than any other ability under the sun.”

—John D. Rockefeller, American industrialist and philanthropist and once the richest man in the world

The Internet supposedly increases communication and brings humanity closer together. Instead, in my generation, I’m noticing quite the opposite. There seems to be less face-to-face communication. Everyone is hooked on social networking websites. We cowardly avoid interaction where there are no facial expressions or tones.”

—First-year college student

We have been given two ears and but a single mouth in order that we may hear more and talk less.”

—Zeno of Citium, Ancient Greek philosopher and founder of Stoic philosophy

others. It’s been long known that interpersonal skills are essential for effective leadership, and more recent research indicates that social intelligence is a better predictor of personal and professional success than intellectual ability.

Another newly identified form of human intelligence is *emotional intelligence*—the ability to recognize our own emotions and the emotions of others, and behave in ways that have a positive impact on how others feel. Research on emotional intelligence also reveals that it’s a better predictor of personal and occupational success than performance on intellectual tests. Emotional self-awareness—a key element of emotional intelligence—is also a characteristic of effective leaders.

The Importance of Social Relationships and Social Intelligence

People with stronger social support networks are happier and live a longer life. Developing strong social support networks is particularly important in today’s high-tech world of virtual reality and online (vs. in-person) communication, both of which make it easier to avoid face-to-face interaction with other people and increase the risk of social isolation and loneliness.



Reflection 8.2

Who are the people in your life that you tend to turn to for social support when you’re experiencing stress or need personal encouragement?

The quality of our social relationships rests heavily on two key skills:

1. *interpersonal communication* skills—how well we communicate (verbally and nonverbally) when interacting with others, and
2. *human relations* skills—how well we relate to and treat others (i.e., people skills).

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Listed below are strategies for strengthening interpersonal communication skills. Some of these strategies may seem very simple or obvious, but they are powerful. Perhaps it’s because they’re so simple that people simply overlook them and forget to use them consistently. Don’t be fooled by the seeming simplicity of the following suggestions and don’t underestimate the positive impact they have on the quality of your interpersonal interactions and relationships.

1. **Take listening seriously.** When people hear the term “communication skills,” the skills of speaking and writing usually come to mind. However, the root of the word “communicate” is *communicare*, meaning “to share or divide out,” which suggests that communication is a two-way process that involves skills not only for delivering information, but receiving it as well.

In fact, studies show that listening is the most frequently used communication skill; we spend more time listening than speaking, reading, and writing. Effective listening skills is also a top-ranking characteristic of effective leaders, and it ranks among the top skills employers look for when hiring and promoting employees.

2. **Use active listening strategies.** We can listen to and understand spoken words at a rate four or more times faster than the average rate at which people speak. This leaves plenty of time for our attention to drift and fall into the trap of *passive listening*—hearing the words with our ears, but not thinking about those words with our mind because our mind is somewhere else. To combat this tendency, we need to engage in *active listening*, which involves: (a) making an effortful attempt to focus full attention on the speaker's message (as opposed to just waiting for our turn to talk or thinking about what we're going to say next); (b) being an empathic listener who attends to the speaker's feelings and nonverbal messages; and (c) being an engaged listener who checks for understanding, expresses interest, and encourages elaboration.



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Note

When you listen actively and closely to others, it sends them the message that you respect them and their thoughts and feelings are worthy of receiving your undivided attention.

Active listening doesn't happen naturally; it's a skill developed through effort and practice that eventually becomes a regular habit. To develop the habit of active listening, engage in the following practices:

- While listening, monitor your understanding of what's being said. Good listeners take personal responsibility for following the speaker's message; in contrast, poor listeners put all the responsibility on the speaker to make the message clear and interesting. One way to check if you've followed the message is to occasionally summarize or paraphrase what you heard the speaker saying in your own words (e.g., "What I hear you saying is . . ."). This not only ensures you understand the message, it also sends the speaker the message that you're really listening to what's being said and taking it seriously.
- Check to be sure you're understanding what the person is *feeling* in addition to what the person is saying (e.g., "I'm sensing that you're feeling . . ."). Be sensitive to nonverbal messages, such as tone of voice and body language; they can often provide clues to the feelings behind the speaker's words. (For instance, speaking at a high rate and with high volume may indicate frustration or anger and speaking at a low rate and with low volume may indicate dejection or depression.)
- When you ask questions, allow the speaker time to formulate a thoughtful response. Be patient with some period of silence. If the silence continues, rephrase the question in a different way.

- Avoid the urge to interrupt the speaker when you think you have something important to say. Wait until the speaker has paused or completed her train of thought.
- If the speaker pauses and you start to say something at the same time the speaker begins to speak again, don't overpower him by speaking louder; let him continue before you express your ideas.
- Be sure your nonverbal messages send the speaker the message that you're interested and nonjudgmental. (For positive, nonverbal communication signals to send while listening, see **Box 8.1**.)

Box 8.1

Nonverbal Behaviors Associated with Active Listening

It's estimated that more than two-thirds of all human communication is nonverbal, and nonverbal messages often communicate stronger and truer messages than spoken language. When there's inconsistency between an individual's verbal and nonverbal message (e.g., one shows interest, the other disinterest), we're more likely to perceive the nonverbal message as the true message. Thus, "body language" may be the most powerful way a listener can communicate genuine interest in the speaker's message, as well as interest in and respect for the speaker. (Similarly, when we're speaking, awareness of our listeners' body language can provide us with important clues about whether we're holding or losing their interest.)



The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said"

—Peter F. Drucker, Austrian author and founder of the study of "management"

Good listeners listen with their whole body and they use body language to signal their attention and interest. The different body language signals we should send while listening may be summarized in the acronym SOFTEN:

S = Smile. Smiling sends signals of acceptance and interest. However, smiling should be periodic, not continuous. (A sustained smile can come across as an insincere or artificial pose.)

Sit Still. Fidgeting or squirming sends the message that you're bored or growing impatient (and can't wait to move onto something else).

O = Open Posture. Avoid closed-posture positions, such as crossing your arms or folding your hands;

they can send the message that you're not open to what the speaker is saying or passing judgment on what's being said.

F = Forward Lean. Leaning *forward* sends the message that you're looking forward to what the speaker is going to say next. In contrast, leaning back can send a signal that you're backing off from (losing interest in) what's being said, or that you're evaluating (psychoanalyzing).

Face the Speaker Directly. Line up your shoulders with the speaker's shoulders rather than turning one shoulder away—which sends the message that you want to get away or are giving the speaker the "cold shoulder."

T = Touch. An occasional light touch on the arm or hand can be a good way to communicate warmth—but not repeated touching, stroking, or rubbing—which could be interpreted as inappropriate intimacy (or sexual harassment).

E = Eye Contact. Lack of eye contact sends the message that you're looking around for something more interesting or stimulating than the speaker. However, eye contact shouldn't be continuous because that borders on staring or glaring. Instead, strike a happy medium by making *periodic* eye contact.

N = Nod Your Head. Nodding slowly and periodically while listening sends the signal that you're following what's being said and affirming the person saying it. However, avoid rapid and repeated head nodding; this sends the message that you want the speaker to hurry up and finish up so you can start talking!

Source: Barker, L., & Watson, K.W. (2000). *Listen up: How to improve relationships, reduce stress, and be more productive by using the power of listening*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Reflection 8.3

Are there any effective nonverbal listening messages cited in Box 8.1 that you weren't already aware of, or that you need to work on?

An interesting exercise you can use to gain greater awareness of your nonverbal communication habits is to choose a couple of people whom you trust, and who know you well, and ask them to imitate your body language. This exercise can frequently be revealing (and sometimes very entertaining).

3. Be open to listening to different conversational topics and viewpoints.

Don't be a close-minded or selective listener who listens to others like you're listening to a radio—selecting or tuning into only those stations that immediately capture your own interests or reinforce your opinions—while tuning out or turning off everything else. This is an issue of social etiquette and social ethics. It's also a learning issue because we learn the most from others whose interests and viewpoints don't duplicate our own. Thus, ignoring or blocking out information and ideas about topics that don't immediately interest you or support your particular perspective is not only a poor social skill; it's also a poor learning strategy.

When others express ideas you don't agree with, you still owe them the courtesy of listening to what they have to say (and not immediately shaking your head, frowning, or interrupting them). After others finish expressing their point of view, you should then feel free to express your own. You certainly have the right to express your viewpoints, as long as you don't express them in such an opinionated way that it makes others feel their views weren't heard or welcomed.



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Reflection 8.4

On what topics do you hold strong opinions?

When you express these opinions, how do others usually react to you?

4. **Communicate your ideas precisely and concisely.** When we speak, our goal should be to get to our point, make it, get “off stage,” and give someone else a chance to talk. Nobody appreciates “stage hogs” who dominate

Be sincere; be brief; be seated.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd president of the United States

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It does not require many words to speak the truth.”

—Chief Joseph, leader of the Nez Percé, Native American Indian tribe

To talk without thinking is to shoot without aiming.”

—An English proverb

I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say.”

—Calvin Coolidge, 30th U.S. president

We should be aware of the magic contained in a name. The name sets that individual apart; it makes him or her unique among all others. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”

—Dale Carnegie, author of the best-selling book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and founder of *The Dale Carnegie Course*—a worldwide leadership training program for business professionals

the conversation and gobble up more than their fair share of conversation time.

You can make your spoken messages less time-consuming and more to the point by avoiding tangents, unnecessary details, and empty fillers (e.g., “like,” “kinda like,” “I mean,” “I’m all,” and “you know”). Fillers such as these just “fill up” time and waste conversation time while adding nothing substantial or meaningful to the conversation. Excessive use of fillers can also result in listeners losing patience, interest, and respect for the speaker.

5. Take time to gather your thoughts before expressing them.

It's better to think silently *before* speaking aloud than to think aloud *while* talking. Giving forethought to what you're going to say will enable you to speak economically and open up more time for others to speak.

6. Be comfortable with silent spells that may take place during conversations.

Silence can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable (like being in an elevator with a stranger). To relieve the discomfort of silence, it's tempting to rush in and say anything to get the conversation going again. Although this may be well intended, it can result in speaking before (and without) thinking. Probably more often than not, it's better to hold back our words and think them through before blurring them out. Silent spots in a conversation shouldn't always be viewed as a “communication breakdown.” Instead, they may indicate that the people involved in the conversation are pausing to think deeply about what each other is saying and are comfortable enough with each other to allow these reflective pauses to take place.

Reflection 8.5

Would you say that you're a good conversationalist?

If yes, what makes you so?

If no, what prevents you from being one?

Human Relations Skills (a.k.a. “People Skills”)

In addition to communicating well with others, another key component of social intelligence is *human relations* skills—how well we relate to and treat others. Listed below are specific strategies for strengthening human relations skills.

Learn and remember the names of people you meet. When you refer to a person by name, you affirm that person's individuality and unique identity. You've