

10

CHAPTER

Communicating Effectively

Key Concepts

After completing this chapter, you will be able to define these supervisory terms:

- active listening
- assertiveness training
- body language
- channel
- communication
- decoding
- encoding
- feedback loop
- formal communication
- grapevine
- informal communication
- message
- nonverbal communication
- richness of information
- roles
- verbal intonation

Chapter Outcomes and Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 10-1. Define *communication* and the communication process.
- 10-2. Contrast formal and informal communication.
- 10-3. Explain how electronic communication affects the supervisor's job.
- 10-4. List barriers to effective communication.
- 10-5. Describe techniques for overcoming communication barriers.
- 10-6. List the requirements for active listening.
- 10-7. Explain the behaviors necessary for providing effective feedback

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Responding to a Supervisory Dilemma



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Communication takes place every day in every organization, in all areas, and by all organizational members. Most of that communication tends to be work related, but as the following story shows, sometimes that communication doesn't lead to positive outcomes.

Sixty percent of respondents in a recent employee survey said that gossip was their biggest pet peeve about their jobs. Most gossip centers on the workplace and the personal lives of coworkers. How often have you gossiped at work—either as a sender or as a receiver? Although you may think workplace gossip is harmless, it can have some pretty serious consequences. First, spreading rumors can damage morale and increase anxiety. Second, it can hamper productivity and impact performance. And it can lead to something you might not even have considered, as it did for four former employees of the town of Hooksett, New Hampshire. Fired by the city council for gossiping about their boss, they learned the hard way that gossip can cost you your job.*

The longtime employees were fired because one of the women had used derogatory terms to describe the town administrator and because all of them had discussed a rumor that he was having an affair with a female subordinate. All four of the women acknowledged feeling resentment toward the woman, who worked in a specially created position and was paid more than two of the gossiping employees, despite having less experience and seniority.

Despite an appeal of their dismissal by the four employees, the Hooksett council didn't budge and stated, "These employees do not represent the best interests of the town of Hooksett and the false rumors, gossip and derogatory statements have contributed to a negative working environment and malcontent among their fellow employees." Despite national media attention and a petition signed by 419 residents asking for the women to be reinstated, the city council didn't waver on its decision. An attorney for the four women said that his clients were "legitimately questioning the conduct of their supervisor, and whether the female subordinate was getting preferential treatment. It almost cheapens it to call it gossip. It might have been idle, not particularly thoughtful, talk. But there was no harm intended."

Although the four women represented nearly fifty years of combined service to the city and all had positive performance reviews, the town council believed that the women's actions were "insubordinate" and "dishonest." All four received a settlement for being fired, which cost the town a total of \$330,000. The settlement agreement also stipulated, however, that two of the women can never apply for a job with the town again.

What do you think? Gossip is interpersonal communication, but it presents an ethical dilemma relating to the distortion of information and is something that supervisors have to deal with. Is it okay for employees to openly gossip about others in the organization? Do you agree with the action of the city council? If the women in this story had taken their concerns to management regarding the alleged affair, how do you think it would have changed the outcome? Viewed in a different context, does the story shift from one of malicious gossip to one of concern over a potential sexual harassment situation? What guidelines would you suggest for supervisors who want guidance in deciding when it is appropriate to control workplace gossip?

*J. McGregor, "Mining the Office Chatter," *BusinessWeek*, May 19, 2008, 54; E. Zimmerman, "Gossip Is Information by Another Name," *New York Times Online*, February 3, 2008; A. Fisher, "Harmless Office Chitchat or Poisonous Gossip?" *CNNMoney.com*, November 12, 2007; S. Armour, "Did You Hear the Story About Office Gossip?" *USA Today*, September 10, 2007, 1B+; "Women Lose Jobs over Office Scuttlebutt," *AARP Bulletin*, July–August 2007, 11; G. Cuyler, "Hooksett 4 to Seek Judge's Aid in Getting Jobs Back," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, June 25, 2007; and P. B. Erickson, "Drawing the Line Between Gossip, Watercooler Chat," *NewsOK.com*, June 15, 2007.

The following episodes occurred in one 8-hour day at a large Marriott hotel in Phoenix, Arizona.

Episode 1: The supervisor of convention sales, Ronnie Barnes, was reviewing last quarter's sales report in preparation for a performance review with each of her three employees. Concerned particularly about Patti Williams's performance, Ronnie called Patti into her office. "Patti, I just saw your last quarter's sales numbers. I thought we had agreed on a goal of six major conventions [1,000 or more room nights] for the quarter. Now I'm looking at the data and it says you booked only four. What happened?" "I don't understand the problem," Patti responded. "Six was our goal—my target. It was something we were trying to reach. I didn't understand that to mean that it was a do-or-die proposition." Patti was noticeably upset, and Ronnie was trying to control her frustration. "Patti, six was our goal all right. But it wasn't some 'pie-in-the-sky' number. It was the minimum number of bookings we were counting on you to make. You're responsible for getting us the big conventions. Robin and Carlos handle the smaller ones. You know we rely on the big conventions to keep our occupancy rates up. I told Liz [the hotel's general manager and Ronnie's immediate boss] we'd book at least six big conventions in the second quarter. Now I've got to explain why we missed our goal!"

Episode 2: A memo had gone out a number of months previously from the hotel's director of human resources to all managers and supervisors. The topic of the memo was a change in the hotel's leave-without-pay policy. A complaint from the buyer in the food and beverage department had just been received by the director of human resources. The employee's complaint was that his request for a two-week leave without pay to handle personal and financial problems related to the death of his mother had been denied by his supervisor. He felt his request was reasonable and should have been approved. Interestingly, the memo in question specifically stated that leaves of up to three weeks because of a death in the family were to be uniformly approved. When the human resource director called the food and beverage supervisor to follow up on the employee complaint, she was told by the supervisor, "I never knew there was a change of policy on leaves without pay."

Episode 3: The following conversation took place between two bellhops. "Did you hear the latest? The general manager's daughter is marrying some guy from New Jersey who's serving a five-year sentence for some offense he committed in his franchise. Heard it involved millions of dollars." "You're kidding!" responded the other. "No, I'm not kidding! I heard it this morning from Larry in maintenance. Can you imagine how the family must feel?"

This rumor had some basis in fact but was far from accurate. The truth was that the previous week, the general manager had announced the engagement of her daughter to a football player with the New York Jets—an offensive lineman who just happened to have the "franchise player" label put on him—and had just signed a new five-year multimillion-dollar contract.

These three episodes demonstrate three facts about communication. First, words mean different things to different people. In the first instance, to Ronnie Barnes a goal meant a minimum level of attainment, whereas to Patti Williams it meant a maximum target that one tried to reach. Second, the initiation of a message is no assurance that it is received or understood as intended. Third, communications often become distorted as they are transmitted from person to person. As the marriage rumor illustrates, "facts" in messages can lose much of their accuracy as they are transmitted and translated.

These episodes illustrate potential communication problems for supervisors. The importance of effective communication for supervisors can't be overemphasized—for one specific reason. Everything a supervisor does involves communicating. You can't make a decision without information and that information has to be communicated. Once a decision is made, communication must again take place. Otherwise, no one will know you've made a decision. The best idea, the most creative suggestion, or the finest plan cannot take form without communication. Supervisors work with their employees,

peers, immediate managers, people in other departments, customers, and others to get their own departments' objectives accomplished; the interactions with these various individuals all require communication of some type. The successful supervisor needs effective communication skills, but good communication skills alone don't make a successful supervisor. However, ineffective communication skills can lead to a continuous stream of problems for the supervisor.

OBJECTIVE 10-1

Define *communication* and the communication process.

communication

The transference and understanding of meaning.

What Is Communication?

Communication involves the transfer of meaning. If no information or ideas have been conveyed, communication has not taken place. However, for communication to be successful, the meaning must not only be imparted but also understood. A memo addressed to us in a foreign language cannot be considered a communication until we have it translated. Therefore, communication is the transference and understanding of meaning.

Finally, good communication is often erroneously defined by the communicator as "agreement" instead of "clarity of understanding." If someone disagrees with us, many of us assume the person just didn't fully understand our position. We may define good communication as having someone accept our views. But a person can clearly understand what you mean and not agree with what you say. In fact, a supervisor concluding that a lack of communication is the cause of a long-term conflict between two employees may find there is plenty of effective communication going on. Each fully understands the other's position. The problem is one of equating effective communication with agreement.

The Communication Process

Communication can be thought of as a process or flow. Communication problems occur when there are deviations or blockages in that flow. Before communication can take place, a purpose, expressed as a message to be conveyed, is needed. It passes between a source (the sender) and a receiver. The message is encoded (converted to symbolic form) and is passed by way of some medium (channel) to the receiver, who retranslates (decodes) the message initiated by the sender. The result is transference of meaning from one person to another.¹

Exhibit 10-1 depicts the *communication process*. This model is made up of seven parts: (1) the sender, (2) encoding, (3) the message, (4) the channel, (5) decoding, (6) the receiver, and (7) feedback.

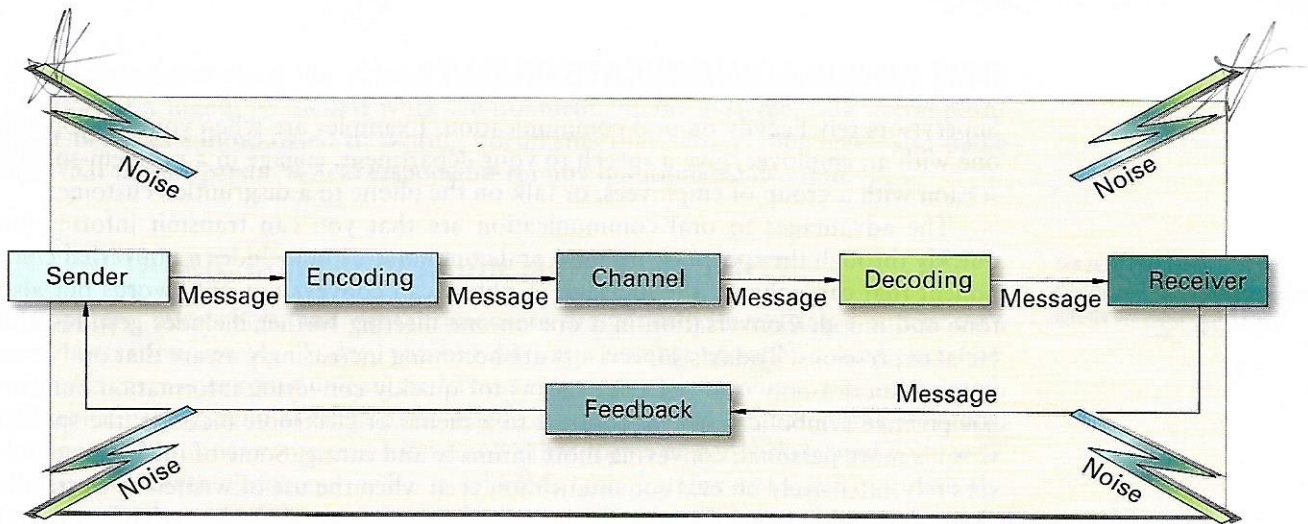
encoding

The conversion of a message into symbolic form.

The sender initiates a message by **encoding** a thought. Three primary conditions affect the encoded message: skill, knowledge, and the social-cultural system.

Communication depends on our writing skills. If writers don't have the requisite writing skills, their messages will not reach readers in the form desired. One's communicative success includes speaking, reading, listening, and reasoning skills as well. Restricted in our communicative activity by the extent of our knowledge of the particular topic, we cannot communicate what we don't know. Should our knowledge be too extensive, it's possible that our receiver will not understand our message. The amount of knowledge the sender holds about their subject will affect the message they seek to transfer. Finally, as knowledge influences our behavior, so does our position in the social-cultural system in which we exist. Beliefs and values, all part of our culture, act to influence us as a communicative source.

¹D. K. Berlo, *The Process of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), 30–32.

**Exhibit 10-1***The communication process.***message**Information that is sent.**channel**The medium by which a message travels.**decoding**A receiver's translation of a sender's message.**feedback loop**Information received by the sender from a receiver regarding a message that was sent.

The **message** is the actual physical product from the sender's encoding. "When we speak, the speech is the message. When we write, the writing is the message. When we paint, the picture is the message. When we gesture, the movements of our arms, the expressions on our face are the message."² Our message is affected by the code or group of symbols we use to transfer meaning, the content of the message itself, and the decisions that we make in selecting and arranging both codes and content.

The **channel** is the medium through which the message travels. It is selected by the sender, who must determine which channel is formal and which one is informal. Formal channels are established by the organization and transmit messages pertaining to the job-related activities of members. They traditionally follow the authority network within the organization. Personal or social messages typically follow the informal channels in the organization.

The receiver is the object to whom the message is directed. They must translate message symbols into an understandable form. This is the **decoding** of the message. Just as the encoder was limited by their skills, attitudes, knowledge, and social-cultural system, the receiver is equally restricted. The sender must be skillful in writing or speaking, the receiver must be skillful in reading or listening, and both must be able to reason. One's knowledge, attitudes, and cultural background influence one's ability to receive, just as they do the ability to send.

The final link in the communication process is a **feedback loop**. Feedback is the check on how successful we have been in transferring our messages as originally intended. It determines whether understanding has been achieved.

Methods of Communication

Supervisors participate in two types of communication. One is **formal communication**. It addresses task-related issues and tends to follow the organization's authority chain. When supervisors give directions, provide advice to a departmental team, receive suggestions from employees, interact with other supervisors, or respond to a request from their boss, they are engaged in formal communication. Supervisors engage in formal communication through speech, written documents, electronic media, and nonverbal behavior. The other type is **informal communication**. This type of communication moves in any direction, skips authority levels, and is as likely to satisfy social needs as it is to facilitate task accomplishments.

OBJECTIVE 10-2

Contrast formal and informal communication.

formal communicationCommunication that addresses task-related issues and tends to follow the organization's authority chain.**informal communication**Communication that moves in any direction, skips authority levels, and is as likely to satisfy social needs as it is to facilitate task accomplishments.

²Berlo, *Process of Communication*, 30–32.

and Facebook and even text messaging to communicate with colleagues and customers, the shorthand abbreviations are often necessary to stay within message length limits. However, as the NSFW example showed, not knowing or even misunderstanding the lingo can lead to surprises, inappropriate responses, or miscommunications.

IM benefits businesses that work in teams or on projects because it enhances collaboration. Be aware, along with time and cost savings, there are risks and downsides to its use. Here are ten IM dos and don'ts.⁵

1. DO adopt a user policy containing at least general guidelines for IM between employees, customers, or business partners.
2. DON'T use IM to communicate confidential or sensitive information. Leave the IM for quick information about project status, meeting times, or a person's whereabouts.
3. DO organize your contact lists to separate business contacts from family and friends to eliminate the possibility that a social contact could be included in a business chat with employees, customers, or business partners.
4. DON'T allow excessive personal messaging at work; instead urge that personal chats be done during breaks or the lunch hour or that the chats generate new customers or revenue to the business.
5. DO be aware that instant messages can be saved and the record is not always wiped when users are done. Parties to conversations can copy and paste the chat onto a Notepad or Word document and some IM services allow users to archive entire messages. Be careful what is written, just as you would in an e-mail!
6. DON'T compromise the company's liability or individual reputation by making statements that could damage personal, or company, integrity or credibility. Again, be careful about what is written.
7. DO be aware of virus infections and related security risks. Because most IM services allow file transfer with messages, learn about the organization's quality of firewall protection and decide whether or not to restrict transferring files through IM.
8. DON'T share personal data or information through IM because the chat text is relayed to a Web server en route to your contact and IM providers or hackers can see it. Send critical info through an encrypted e-mail only.
9. DO keep instant messages simple by limiting the inquiry, avoiding unnecessary blather, getting to the point, and knowing when to say goodbye.
10. DON'T confuse contacts with a misleading user name or status; update status throughout the day so contacts know whether users are available for messages or offline.

HOW DOES NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AFFECT YOUR COMMUNICATION?

Some of the most meaningful communication is not spoken, written, or transmitted on a computer. This is **nonverbal communication**. A loud siren or a red light at an intersection tells you something without words. When you are conducting a training session, you don't need words to tell you that employees are bored when their eyes get glassy or they fall asleep. Similarly, generally you can tell by body language and verbal intonations whether the boss is angry, upbeat, anxious, or distracted.

Body language refers to gestures, facial configurations, and other movements of the body. Narrowed eyes, a clenched jaw, or a beet-red face, for example, says something different from a smile. Hand motions, facial expressions, and other gestures can

nonverbal communication

Communication that is not spoken, written, or transmitted on a computer.

body language

Gestures, facial configurations, and other movements of the body that communicate emotions or temperaments such as aggression, fear, shyness, arrogance, joy, and anger.

⁵M. Enbysk, "10 Tips for Using Instant Messaging for Business," 2011, Microsoft Corporation, Microsoft Business, <http://www.microsoft.com/business/en-us/resources/ArticleReader/website/default.aspx?Print=1&ArticleId=tipsforusinginstantmessagingforbusiness&fbid=W5j9HZ3WlNn> (accessed May 24, 2011).

communicate emotions or temperaments such as aggression, fear, shyness, arrogance, joy, and anger.⁶

Verbal intonation refers to the emphasis one gives to words or phrases. To illustrate, consider the supervisor who asks a colleague a question. The colleague replies, “What do you mean by that?” The supervisor’s reaction will vary, depending on the tone of the colleague’s response. A soft, smooth tone creates a different meaning from one that is abrasive and puts a strong emphasis on the last word. Most of us would view the first intonation as coming from someone who sincerely seeks clarification, whereas the second suggests that the person is aggressive or defensive.

Because the nonverbal component is likely to carry the greatest impact, the fact that every oral communication also has a nonverbal message cannot be overemphasized. Most of us know that animals respond to how we say something rather than what we say. Apparently, people aren’t much different.

WHAT IS THE GRAPEVINE?

The **grapevine** is active in almost all organizations. In fact, studies typically find that the grapevine is the means of communication by which most operative employees first hear about important changes introduced by organizational leaders. It rates ahead of all other formal sources.

Is the information that flows along the grapevine accurate? Sometimes, but accuracy aside, it’s important to consider the conditions that foster an active grapevine. Rumors have at least four purposes: to structure and reduce anxiety; to make sense of limited or fragmented information; to serve as a vehicle to organize group members, and possibly outsiders, into coalitions; and to signal a sender’s status (“I’m an insider and you’re not”) or power (“I have the power to make you an insider”). Studies have found that rumors emerge in response to situations that are important to us, where there is ambiguity, or under conditions that arouse anxiety. Work situations frequently contain these three elements; that’s why rumors flourish in organizations. The secrecy and competition that typically prevail in large organizations—around such issues as appointment of new bosses, relocation of offices, realignment of work assignments, and layoffs—create conditions that encourage and sustain rumors on the grapevine. A rumor will persist either until the wants and expectations creating the uncertainty underlying the rumor are fulfilled or until the anxiety is reduced.

We can conclude that the grapevine is an important part of any group’s or organization’s communication system and well worth understanding. Moreover, it’s never going to be eliminated, so supervisors should use it in beneficial ways. Given that only a small set of employees typically passes information to more than one other person, you can analyze grapevine information and predict its flow. Certain messages are likely to follow predictable patterns. Consider using the grapevine informally to transmit information to specific individuals by planting messages with key people who are active on the grapevine and are likely to find a given message worthy of passing on.

The grapevine is also valuable for identifying issues that employees consider important and that create anxiety among them. It acts as both a filter and a feedback mechanism, picking up issues that employees consider relevant and planting messages that employees want passed on to those “running” the organization. For instance, if the grapevine is hopping with a rumor of a mass layoff, and if you know the rumor is totally false, the message still has meaning. It reflects the fears and concerns of employees and, hence, should not be ignored.

Electronic communication is affecting everything and the grapevine is no exception. Corporate blogs are reshaping the grapevine. Blogs are used internally to disseminate information to employees or externally to aid in marketing and public relations; corporate

verbal intonation

The emphasis an individual gives to words or phrases through speech.

grapevine

The means of communication by which most operative employees first hear about important changes introduced by organizational leaders; the rumor mill.

⁶M. Fulfer, “Nonverbal Communication: How to Read What’s Plain as the Nose...or Eyelid...or Chin...on Their Faces,” *Journal of Occupational Excellence* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 19–38.

blogs are being used to reach corporate goals. Blogs display information in reverse chronological order, allowing participants to ask questions, make comments, and receive comments from a variety of sources in a logical evolving fashion, similar to an ongoing conversation around the water cooler. Because the blog is available to a wide audience, many organizations institute a code of ethics that is applied to all postings. Internal blogs allow individuals in multiple locations and time zones to participate in discussions of concern to employees and management so that the blog becomes an electronic grapevine!⁷

OBJECTIVE 10-4

List barriers to effective communication.

Barriers to Effective Communication

As noted previously, the goal of perfect communication is to transmit a thought or idea from a sender to a receiver so that it is perceived by the receiver exactly the same as it was envisioned by the sender. That goal is almost never achieved because of distortions and other barriers. In this section, we describe some of the more serious barriers that hinder effective communication (see Exhibit 10-2). In the following section, we offer some suggestions for how to overcome these barriers.

HOW DOES LANGUAGE AFFECT COMMUNICATION?

Words mean different things to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are three of the most obvious variables that influence the language people use and the definitions they give to words. In an organization, employees usually come from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, horizontal differentiation creates specialists who develop their own jargon or technical language. In large organizations, members are often widely dispersed geographically, and those in each locale use terms and

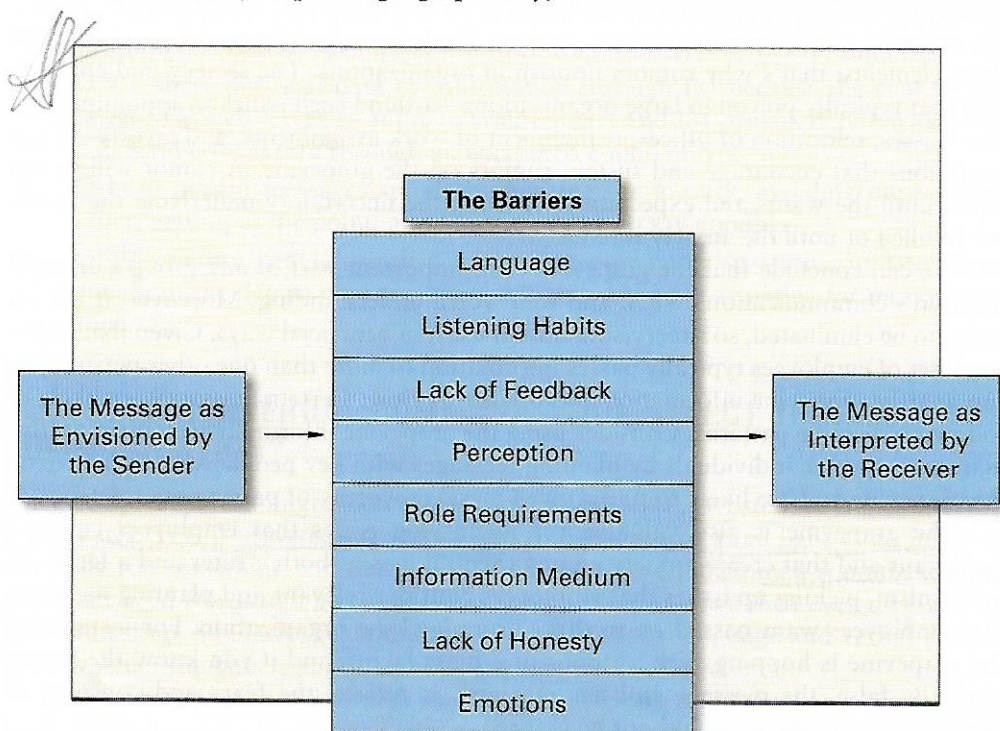


Exhibit 10-2

Barriers to effective communication.

⁷"Corporate Blog," *Wikipedia*, June 18, 2008, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_blog; "Is Blogging Really Good for My Company? Or Just a Buzz Word?" *Intra Focus*, January 18, 2007, intrafocus.wordpress.com/2007/01/18/is-blogging-really-good-for-my-company-or-just-a-buzz-word (accessed June 19, 2008); "GM Blogger's Code of Ethics," *GM FastLane Blog*, June 18, 2008, fastlane.gmblogs.com/about.html (accessed June 19, 2008); and J. Sessum, "Why CEOs Should Blog," *Global PR Blog Week 2.0*, September 19, 2005, www.globalprblogweek.com/2005/09/19/sessum-why-ceos-should-blog (accessed June 19, 2008).

phrases that are unique to their area. Vertical differentiation can also cause language problems. For instance, differences in the meaning of words such as *incentives* and *quotas* occur at different levels of managerial personnel. Senior managers, for example, often speak about the need for incentives and quotas. Yet these terms have been found to imply manipulation and create resentment among supervisors.

Although we may speak the same language (e.g., English), our use of that language is far from uniform. Knowledge of how each of us modifies the language would minimize communication difficulties. The problem is that you don't know how various employees, peers, superiors, customers, and others with whom you interact have modified the language. Senders tend to assume that the words and terms they use mean the same to the receiver as they do to them. This is often incorrect and creates communication difficulties.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Most of us hear, but we don't listen! Hearing is merely picking up sound vibrations. Listening is making sense out of what we hear and requires paying attention, interpreting, and remembering what is being said.

Many of us are poor listeners and it suffices to say that if you don't have good listening skills, you're not going to get the full message as the sender meant to convey it. We share common flaws regarding listening. We get distracted and end up hearing only parts of a message. Instead of listening for meaning, we listen to determine whether we agree or disagree with what's being said. We begin thinking about our response to what's being said rather than listening for the complete message. Each of these flaws in listening contributes to messages being received differently from what the sender intended.

DID YOU GET MY MESSAGE?

Effective communication means the transference and understanding of meaning. Feedback lets you know whether someone has received your message and comprehended it in the way that you meant. When you request that each member of your staff submit a specific report, receipt of the report is feedback. Likewise, when your instructor tests you on the material in this book, you're getting feedback on your understanding of the material. Lack of feedback creates the potential for inaccuracies and distortions.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

Your attitudes, interests, past experiences, and expectations determine how you organize and interpret your surroundings. This explains how you can look at the same thing as someone else and perceive it differently (see Exhibit 10-3). In the communication process, the receiver selectively sees and hears messages based on their background and personal characteristics. They also project their interests and expectations into communications when interpreting them. Because senders and receivers of communications each bring their own set of perceptual biases, the messages they seek to transfer often are subject to distortions.

WHAT DO ROLES HAVE TO DO WITH COMMUNICATION?

People in organizations play **roles**. They engage in behavior patterns that go with the positions they occupy in the organization. Supervisory jobs come with role identities. Supervisors know they are supposed to be loyal to and defend their boss and the organization. Union leaders' roles require loyalty to union goals such as improving employee security. Marketing roles demand efforts to increase sales, whereas the roles of people working in the credit department emphasize minimizing losses from bad debts.

As organizations impose different role requirements on different members, they create communication barriers. Each role comes with its own jargon that sets the role

roles

Behavior patterns that correspond to the positions individuals occupy in an organization.

**Exhibit 10-3**

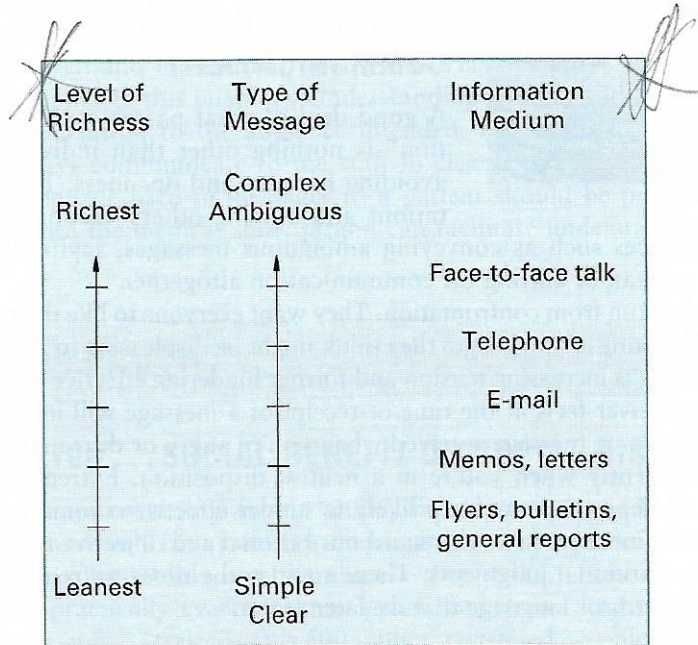
What do you see—an old woman or a young lady?

off from others. Additionally, fulfilling role requirements often requires individuals to selectively interpret events. People in different roles often have difficulty communicating with each other because they hear and see the world consistent with their role requirements. Marketing people say they want to “increase sales.” So, too, do the people in the credit department, except the marketing people want to sell everything to anybody, whereas those in the credit department want to sell only to those who are creditworthy. Labor and company representatives sometimes have difficulty negotiating because their roles encompass different language and interests. Many internal

Comprehension Check 10-1

1. Effective communication does not include
 - a. transference of meaning.
 - b. agreement.
 - c. a sender and a receiver.
 - d. feedback.
2. The conversion of a message into symbolic form is commonly referred to as
 - a. the message.
 - b. feedback.
 - c. encoding.
 - d. a symbol.
3. The emphasis one gives to words or phrases is called
 - a. verbal intonation.
 - b. body language.
 - c. the grapevine.
 - d. feedback.

4. Which one of the following is *not* regarded as a barrier to effective communication?
- Agreement
 - Language
 - Perception
 - Emotions

**Exhibit 10-4***Hierarchy of information richness.*

communication breakdowns in organizations are merely individuals enacting behaviors consistent with the roles they are playing.

IS THERE A PREFERRED INFORMATION MEDIUM?

The amount of information transmitted in a face-to-face conversation is considerably greater than that received from a flyer posted on an organization's bulletin board. The former offers multiple information cues (words, posture, facial expressions, gestures, intonations), immediate feedback, and the personal touch of "being there" that the flyer doesn't. All media differ in the **richness of information** they transmit. Exhibit 10-4 illustrates a hierarchy of information richness. The higher a medium rates in richness, the more information it is capable of transmitting. If the message is ambiguous and complicated, the sender should rely on a rich communication medium.

High-performing supervisors tend to be media sensitive, and their selection of a communication channel targets the use of a rich medium to overcome ambiguity in their message. Using face-to-face meetings, as well as opportunities arising from supervising by walking around, supervisors are engaging in rich communication with employees. Richness comes from the ability of the channel to handle multiple cues at the same time while providing rapid feedback in a personal manner. Face-to-face meetings, video conferences, and phone conversations provide supervisors the opportunity to maximize the information they transmit, and the medium is especially appropriate for messages needing great clarity.

If you want to share with your employees a major new product line that your company will be introducing—and that will affect everyone in your department—your communication is more likely to be effective in a face-to-face departmental meeting than through use of a memo. Bulletins, memos, prerecorded speeches, and e-mail lack the richness of personal communication, but they are effective in transmitting routine

richness of information

A measure of the amount of information that is transmitted based on multiple information cues (words, posture, facial expressions, gestures, intonations), immediate feedback, and the personal touch.



Iakov Filimonov/Shutterstock

Doctors and nurses need to adjust their language constantly. Using medical terminology is required when communicating with other healthcare professionals but is usually not appropriate when talking to a patient unless accompanied by an explanation in “lay terms.”

OBJECTIVE 10-5

Describe techniques for overcoming communication barriers.

messages with a minimum of ambiguity. Modest changes in tomorrow’s departmental production schedule can be effectively communicated in a memo or with an e-mail. Unfortunately, people in organizations don’t always match the medium to the message, and thereby create communication problems.⁸

HOW DOES HONESTY AFFECT COMMUNICATION?

A good deal of what passes as “poor communication” is nothing other than individuals purposely avoiding honesty and openness. To avoid confrontations and hurting others’ feelings, we frequently

engage in practices such as conveying ambiguous messages, saying what we think others want to hear, or cutting off communication altogether.

Some people run from confrontation. They want everyone to like them. As such, they avoid communicating any messages they think might be displeasing to the receiver. What they end up doing is increasing tension and further hindering effective communication.

How the receiver feels at the time of receipt of a message will influence how they interpret it. The same message received when you’re angry or distraught is likely to be interpreted differently when you’re in a neutral disposition. Extreme emotions such as jubilation or depression are most likely to hinder effective communication. In such instances, we are most prone to disregard our rational and objective thinking processes and substitute emotional judgments. These are also the times we’re most likely to use inflammatory words or language that we later regret.

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS?

A few barriers are part of organizational life and will never be fully eliminated. Perceptual and role differences should be recognized as barriers but are not easily corrected. However, most barriers to effective communication can be overcome. The following provides some guidance.

Think First Think before you speak! Before you speak or write, ask yourself: What message am I trying to convey? Then ask: How can I organize and present my message so that it will achieve the desired outcome? Most of us follow the “Think first” dictum when writing a message. The formal and deliberate process of writing encourages thinking through what we want to say and how best to say it. The concept of working on a draft implies that the written document will be edited and revised. Few of us give anywhere near the same attention to our verbal communications. That’s a mistake. Before you speak, make sure you know what you want to say. Then, present your message in a logical and organized fashion so that it is clear and can be understood by your receiver.

Constrain Emotions It is naïve to assume you always communicate in a fully rational manner. You know emotions can severely cloud and distort the transference of meaning. If emotionally upset over an issue, you’re more likely to misconstrue incoming messages and fail to express your outgoing messages clearly and accurately. We recommend you discontinue further communication until you have regained composure.

⁸S. Robbins and T. Judge, *Organizational Behavior*, 13th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 367–368.

Learn to Listen Most of us are poor listeners but that doesn't mean we can't improve our listening skills. Some specific behaviors have been found to be related to effective listening. We present those skills in the section titled "Active Listening" at the end of this chapter.

Tailor Language to the Receiver Choose words and structure your messages in ways that will be clear and understandable to the receiver. Simplify your language and consider the audience to whom the message is directed so that the language is tailored to the receivers. Remember, effective communication is achieved when a message is both received and understood (see "News Flash! Twitter... Social Benefit or Social Disaster?" later in this chapter). Understanding is improved by simplifying the language used in relation to the audience intended. For example, a nursing supervisor should always communicate to the staff in clear and easily understood terms. However, the language used in messages to a patient should be purposely different from that used with the medical staff. Jargon can facilitate understanding when used

News Flash!

TWITTER... SOCIAL BENEFIT OR SOCIAL DISASTER?

Tweets and twittering. Prior to 2006, the only definition we would have known for these words would have involved birds and the sounds they make. Now, practically everyone knows that Twitter is also an online service—with 500 million registered users, 400 million tweets daily, and 1.6 billion daily search queries—used to trade short messages of 140 characters or less via the Web, cell phones, and other devices. According to its founders (Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams), Twitter is many things: a messaging service, a customer-service tool to reach customers, real-time search, and microblogging. And as the numbers show, it's become quite popular!

One place where Twitter has caught on is the sports world, especially in college sports. For instance, Les Miles, head football coach at Louisiana State University, calls himself "a Twittering kind of guy." He understands the power of instant communication. Miles wants to stay ahead of the competition, especially when it comes to recruiting and keeping fans informed. He's discovered that tweeting is an easy and fun way to communicate quick tidbits of information to fans, alumni boosters, and other interested people who subscribe. And it's a convenient way for football recruiting prospects to communicate with the coaching staff. On game days, he tweets (via a staff assistant) before games, at halftime, and after games. If it's okay for coaches to tweet, what about the student athletes? That's often a different story.

Many universities and college coaches are monitoring and, in some cases, banning athletes' use of social media. A potentially precarious issue can arise if an athlete tweets some comment that could put the university in a negative light, offend boosters, or possibly violate an NCAA regulation. Here are a couple of tweeting slip-ups: A Western Kentucky running back was suspended after he tweeted critical comments about the team's fans; the NCAA pulled fifteen football scholarships after an investigation based on a player's tweet; and a Lehigh University wide receiver was suspended for re-tweeting a racial slur. We even saw how tweeting backfired during the London Olympics. The first "casualty"—a Greek triple jumper—was banned from the Games over some racially charged tweets. That seems to be good reason for the managers (i.e., coaches and administrators) of these programs to attempt to control the information flow.

But is banning the answer? Some analysts say no. They argue that those setting up rules and regulations don't understand what social media is all about and the value it provides as a marketing and recruiting tool, and they argue that it's necessary to understand First Amendment rights (part of which includes freedom of speech). Rather than banning the use of social media, many universities are hiring companies to monitor athletes' posts. This, however, requires athletes to give access to their accounts, which some call an invasion of privacy.

Continued

Sources: Based on R. W. Ahrens, "Tweets Per Day," *USA Today*, March 20, 2013, p. 2A; M. Lopresti, "Elimination by Twitter," *USA Today*, July 26, 2012, p. 1C; K. Paulson, "College Athlete Tweet Ban? Free Speech Sacks That Idea," *USA Today*, April 16, 2012, p. 9A; P. Thamel, "Tracking Twitter, Raising Red Flags," *New York Times Online*, March 30, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/31/sports/universities-track-athletes-online-raising-legal-concerns.html?pagewanted=2&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Organizations/T/Twitter?ref=twitter&r=0> (accessed June 3, 2014); L. Dugan, "Twitter To Surpass 500 Million Registered Users on Wednesday," [www.mediabistro.com](http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/500-million-registered-users_b18842), February 21, 2012, http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/500-million-registered-users_b18842 (accessed June 3, 2014); C. Ho, "Companies Tracking College Athletes' Tweets, Facebook Posts Go After Local Universities," *WashingtonPost*

Online, October 16, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/companies-tracking-college-athletes-tweets-facebook-posts-go-after-local-universities/2011/10/10/gIQAyHZ9oL_story.html (accessed June 3, 2014); D. Rovell, "Coaches Ban of Twitter Proves College Sports Isn't About Education," *CNBC Sports Business Online*, August 8, 2011, <http://www.cnbc.com/id/44058540> (accessed June 3, 2014); Staff of Corporate Executive Board, "Corporate Confidential: How Twitter Changes Everything," *BusinessWeek Online*, September 4, 2009, http://www.businessweek.com/managing/content/sep2009/ca2009094_460379.htm (accessed June 3, 2014); S. Johnson, "How Twitter Will Change the Way We Live," *Time*, June 15, 2009, pp. 30–37; J. Swartz, "A World That's All a-Twitter," *USA Today*, May 26, 2009, pp. 1B+; and K. Whiteside, "College Coaches Are Chirping About Twitter!" *USA Today*, April 29, 2009, pp. 1C+.

with those who know what it means, but it can cause innumerable problems when used outside that group.

Match Words and Actions Actions speak louder than words. It is important to watch your actions to make sure they align with and reinforce the words that go along with them. Because nonverbal messages carry a great deal of weight, effective supervisors watch their nonverbal cues to ensure that the cues also convey the message desired. Remember that as a supervisor, your employees will look at your behavior as a model. If your verbal comments are backed up by your actions, you will gain credibility and build trust. But if you say one thing and do another, your employees will ignore what you say and model themselves on what you do. At the extreme, people stop listening because they no longer believe that your words have credibility.

Use Feedback Many communication problems can be directly attributed to misunderstandings and inaccuracies. These are less likely to occur if you use feedback. This feedback can be verbal or nonverbal. If you ask someone, "Did you understand what I said?" the response represents feedback. But feedback should include more than yes and no answers. You can ask a set of questions about a message to determine whether the message was received as intended. Better yet, you can ask the receiver to restate the message in their own words. If you then hear what was intended, understanding and accuracy should be enhanced.

Feedback also includes subtler things than asking direct questions or summarizing messages. General comments can give you a sense of the receiver's reaction to a message. Of course, performance appraisals, salary reviews, and promotions also represent forms of feedback. Feedback does not have to be conveyed in words. The sales supervisor who sends out a staff directive describing a new monthly sales report that all sales personnel will need to complete receives feedback if some of the salespeople fail to turn in the new report. This feedback suggests that they need to clarify further the initial directive. Similarly, when you give a speech to a group of people, watch their eyes and look for other nonverbal clues to tell you whether they are getting your message. This may explain why television performers on comedy shows prefer to tape their programs in front of a live audience. Immediate laughter and applause—or their absence—convey to the performer whether the message is getting across as intended.

Participate in Assertiveness Training Many people have no trouble asserting themselves. Being open and honest comes naturally to them. Some, in fact, are too assertive. They cross the line and become aggressive and abrasive. Other individuals suffer from a constant fear of upsetting others and fall back on avoidance or ambiguous communication when they need to be open and assertive. Such people would benefit from participation in **assertiveness training**. An effective supervisor needn't always be assertive but should be capable of being so when it's needed.

assertiveness training

A technique designed to make people more open and self-expressive, saying what they mean without being rude or thoughtless.

Assertiveness training is designed to make people more open and self-expressive. They confront issues in a straightforward manner. They say what they mean, without being rude or thoughtless. Individuals who take assertiveness training learn verbal and nonverbal behaviors that enhance their ability to communicate openly and unambiguously. These behaviors include direct and unambiguous language; the use of "I" statements and cooperative "we" statements; a strong, steady, audible voice; good eye contact; facial expressions matched to the message; an appropriately serious tone; and a comfortable but firm posture.

Help Immigrant Workers Assimilate into the Culture Immigrant workers have a responsibility to learn English and adapt to the cultural norms in the U.S. workplace, but this can take time and employers can gain a lot by helping their workers bridge the cultural divide. Many employers, however, have the "sink or swim" attitude and expect immigrant workers to figure things out for themselves. This does not work in many cases, and it is not a wise business decision. Employers benefit by investing in helping immigrant workers adapt to the workplace. When help is given by the employer, it results in increased productivity, higher performance, improved safety, greater trust, and more loyalty among workers. All of these things impact the bottom line in terms of higher business profits in the long term. Human resources professionals offer these tips for employers who want to enhance and retain their immigrant workforce.

Learn as much as you can about the culture of the people you are dealing with.

Recognize the broad ethnic diversity that exists within groups such as Hispanics or Asians.

Respect individual differences, abilities, and personalities by getting to know a person's culture as you get to know them as individuals.

Provide orientation programs for new hires to address cultural differences and language barriers.

Encourage coworkers to serve as mentors or coaches to help new workers adapt to the culture and vocabulary of the workplace.

When working with immigrants, refrain from using jargon or slang that might not translate.

When training immigrant employees, make sure they understand your training material and why it is useful to them.

Never assume your communication with people with limited English-speaking abilities have been understood, and remember to ask for feedback or for demonstration when you are training them.

Be patient when working with immigrants; this will help to prevent feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment when a person cannot express himself or herself clearly or fully.

Recruit bilingual managers and supervisors to serve as the communication link between cultures or engage coworkers to serve as translators while people are learning English.

If you have a number of people in need of learning English, consider partnering with a school to offer on-site English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes. This helps to create a safe environment for learning, and helping people learn English is a way to build trust and loyalty.

Help workers take care of their basic survival needs by helping them find transportation, establish credit, and file income tax returns.

Provide sensitivity training to native workers in the company to make them aware of, and sensitive toward, cultural differences.

Promote immigrants when appropriate; this gives people more opportunities and demonstrates to other immigrants that they can advance if they prove themselves.

Keep current on immigration regulations by reading the INS *Handbook for Employers* and make sure proper employment forms are completed and maintained.⁹

OBJECTIVE 10-6

List the requirements for active listening.

active listening

A technique that requires an individual to “get inside” a speaker’s mind to understand the communication from the speaker’s point of view.

A Special Communication Skill: Active Listening

Effective listening is active rather than passive. In passive listening, you’re like a tape recorder. You absorb the information given. If the speaker provides a clear message and makes their delivery interesting enough to keep your attention, you’ll probably get most of what the speaker is trying to communicate. But **active listening** requires you to “get inside” the speaker’s mind so that you can understand the communication from their point of view. As you’ll see, active listening is hard work.¹⁰ You have to concentrate, and you have to want to fully understand what a speaker is saying (see the section titled “Active Listening” at the end of this chapter). Students who use active listening techniques for an entire lecture are as tired as their instructor when the lecture is over because they’ve put as much energy into listening as the instructor puts into speaking.

There are four requirements for active listening. You need to listen with (1) intensity, (2) empathy, (3) acceptance, and (4) a willingness to take responsibility for completeness. Because listening presents the opportunity for the mind to wander, the active listener concentrates intensely on what the speaker is saying and tunes out thousands of miscellaneous thoughts (work deadlines, money, personal problems) that create distractions. What do active listeners do with their idle brain time? They summarize and integrate what has been said! They put each new bit of information into the context of what has preceded it.

Empathy requires you to put yourself in the speaker’s shoes. Try to understand what the speaker wants to communicate rather than what you want to understand. Notice that empathy demands both knowledge of the speaker and flexibility on your part. Suspend your own thoughts and feelings and adjust what you see and feel to your speaker’s world. In that way, you increase the likelihood that you will interpret the message being spoken in the way the speaker intended.

An active listener demonstrates acceptance. You listen objectively without judging content. This is no easy task. It is natural to be distracted by the content of what a speaker says, especially when you disagree with it. When you hear something you disagree with, you have a tendency to begin formulating mental arguments to counter what is being said. Of course, in doing so, you often miss the rest of the message. The challenge is to absorb what is being said and to withhold judgment on content until the speaker is finished.

The final ingredient of active listening is taking responsibility for completeness. That is, as an active listener, you do whatever is necessary to get the full intended meaning from the speaker’s communication.¹¹

OBJECTIVE 10-7

Explain the behaviors necessary for providing effective feedback.

The Importance of Feedback Skills

Ask a supervisor about the feedback they give to employees, and you’re likely to get a qualified answer. If the feedback is positive, it’s likely to be given promptly and enthusiastically. Feedback for improvement commonly referred to as *negative feedback* is often

⁹Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Board, “Cultural and Language Barriers in the Workplace,” February 2002, <http://www.charlotteworks.org/clbpositionpaper.pdf> (accessed May 24, 2011).

¹⁰R. B. Cousins, “Active Listening Is More Than Just Hearing,” *Supervision* 61, no. 9 (September 2000), 14.

¹¹See, for instance, K. Fracaro, “Two Ears and One Mouth,” *Supervision*, February 2001, 3–5.

treated differently.¹² Like most of us, supervisors don't particularly enjoy communicating bad news. They fear offending or having to deal with the receiver's defensiveness. The result is that feedback for improvement may be avoided, delayed, or distorted. The purposes of this section are to show you the importance of providing both positive feedback and feedback for improvement and to identify specific techniques to help make your feedback more effective.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVEMENT?

We said that supervisors treat positive feedback and feedback for improvement differently. So, too, do receivers. You need to understand this fact and adjust your feedback style accordingly. Positive feedback is more readily and accurately perceived than is feedback for improvement. Furthermore, although positive feedback is almost always accepted, you can expect feedback for improvement to meet resistance. Why? The logical answer appears to be that people want to hear good news and block out the rest. Positive feedback fits what most people wish to hear and already believe about themselves. Does this mean, then, that you should avoid giving feedback for improvement? No! What it means is that you need to be aware of potential resistance and learn to use feedback for improvement in situations in which it's most likely to be accepted. That is, feedback for improvement should be used when it's supported by hard data—numbers, specific examples, and the like.

HOW DO YOU GIVE EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK?

We have six specific suggestions to help you become more effective in providing feedback. We discuss them here and summarize them in Exhibit 10-5.

Focus on Specific Behaviors Feedback should be specific rather than general. Avoid such statements as, "You have a bad attitude" or "I'm really impressed with the good job you did." They're vague and, although they provide information, they don't tell the receiver enough to correct the "bad attitude" or to know on what basis you concluded that a "good job" has been done so that the person knows what behaviors to repeat.

Keep Feedback Impersonal Feedback, particularly for improvement, should be descriptive rather than judgmental or evaluative. No matter how upset you are, keep the feedback focused on job-related behaviors and never criticize someone personally because of an inappropriate action. Telling people they're incompetent, lazy, or the like is almost always counterproductive. It provokes such an emotional reaction that the performance deviation itself is apt to be overlooked. When you're criticizing, remember that you're censuring job-related behavior, not the person. You might be tempted to tell someone they are rude and insensitive (which might just be true); however, that's hardly impersonal. It's better to say something more specific, such as, "You've interrupted me three times with questions that weren't urgent when you knew I was talking long-distance to a customer in Brazil."

- Focus on specific behaviors
- Keep feedback impersonal
- Keep feedback goal oriented
- Make feedback well timed
- Ensure understanding
- Direct feedback for improvement toward behavior that the receiver can control

Exhibit 10-5

Suggestions for effective feedback.

¹²See, for example, K. Leung, S. Su, and M. W. Morris, "When Is Criticism Not Constructive? The Roles of Fairness Perceptions and Dispositional Attributions in Employee Acceptance of Critical Supervisory Feedback," *Human Relations* 54, no. 1 (September 2001), 1155; and C. A. Walker, "Saving Your Rookie Managers from Themselves," *Harvard Business Review* 80, no. 4 (April 2002), 97–103.

Keep Feedback Goal Oriented Feedback should not be given primarily to “dump” or “unload” on another person. If you have to provide feedback for improvement, make sure it’s directed toward the receiver’s goals. Ask yourself whom the feedback is supposed to help. If the answer is essentially you—“I’ve got something I just want to get off my chest”—bite your tongue and hold the comment. Such feedback undermines your credibility and lessens the meaning and influence of future feedback sessions.

Make Feedback Well Timed Feedback is most meaningful to a receiver when there is a short interval between their behavior and the receipt of feedback about that behavior. For example, a new employee who makes a mistake is more likely to respond to suggestions for improving right after the mistake or at the end of the workday—rather than during a performance review session six months later. If you have to spend time recreating a situation and refreshing someone’s memory of it, the feedback you’re providing is likely to be ineffective. Moreover, if you’re particularly concerned with changing behavior, delays in providing timely feedback on the undesirable actions lessen the likelihood that the feedback will be effective in bringing about the desired change. Of course, making feedback prompt merely for promptness’s sake can backfire if you have insufficient information or if you’re otherwise emotionally upset. In such instances, “well timed” could mean “somewhat delayed.”

Ensure Understanding Is your feedback concise and complete enough that the receiver clearly and fully understands your communication? Remember that every successful communication requires both transference and understanding of meaning. If feedback is to be effective, you need to ensure that the receiver understands it. Consistent with our discussion of listening techniques, you should have the receiver rephrase the content of your feedback to find out whether it fully captured the meaning you intended.

Direct Feedback for Improvement Feedback for improvement should be directed toward behavior the receiver can do something about. There’s little value in reminding a person of some shortcoming over which they have no control. For instance, to criticize an employee who’s late for work because she forgot to set her alarm clock is valid. To criticize her for being late for work when the subway she takes to work every day had a power failure, stranding her for ninety minutes, is pointless. There’s nothing she could have done to correct what happened—short of finding a different means of traveling to work, which may be unrealistic.

In addition, when feedback for improvement is given concerning something that the receiver can control, it might be a good idea to indicate specifically what can be done to improve the situation. This takes some of the sting out of the criticism and offers guidance to employees who understand the problem but don’t know how to resolve it.

Comprehension Check 10-2

5. Active listening is best described as
 - a. agreeing with what the sender communicates.
 - b. asking lots of questions.
 - c. concentrating on what's being communicated.
 - d. providing a lot of feedback.
6. The most crucial linkage in communications is
 - a. agreement.
 - b. constraining emotions.
 - c. feedback.
 - d. tailoring language to the receiver.
7. Which one of the following is *not* a recommendation on giving effective feedback?
 - a. Keep feedback personal
 - b. Focus on specific behavior
 - c. Keep feedback goal oriented
 - d. Make feedback well timed
8. A technique to make people more open and self-expressive is called
 - a. feedback training.
 - b. assertiveness training.
 - c. grapevine training.
 - d. communications training.

Enhancing Understanding

SUMMARY

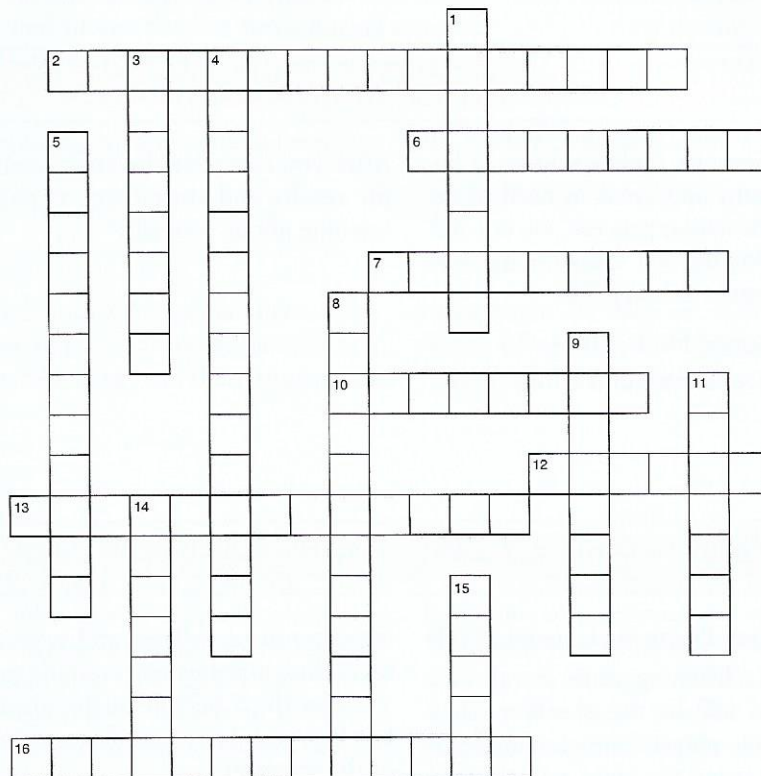
After reading this chapter, I can:

1. **Define *communication* and the communication process.** Communication is the transference and understanding of meaning. Effective communication, however, does not imply agreement. The communication process begins with a communication sender (a source) who has a message to convey. The message is converted to symbolic form (encoding) and passed by way of a channel to the receiver, who decodes the message. To ensure accuracy, the receiver should provide the sender with feedback as a check on whether understanding has been achieved.
2. **Contrast formal and informal communication.** Formal communication addresses task-related issues and tends to follow the organization's authority chain. Informal communication moves in any direction, skips authority levels, and is as likely to satisfy social needs as it is to facilitate task accomplishments.
3. **Explain how electronic communication affects the supervisor's job.** Electronic communication allows supervisors to transmit messages twenty-four hours a day and stay in constant contact with department members, other supervisors, and key members of the organization regardless of where they are physically located. Networks also allow supervisors to participate in electronic meetings and interact with key people outside the organization.
4. **List barriers to effective communication.** Barriers to effective communication include language differences, poor listening habits, lack of feedback, differences in perception, role requirements, poor choice of information medium, lack of honesty, and emotions.
5. **Describe techniques for overcoming communication barriers.** Techniques for overcoming communication barriers include thinking through what you want to say before communicating, constraining emotions, learning to listen, tailoring language to the receiver, matching words and actions, using feedback, and participating in assertiveness training.
6. **List the requirements for active listening.** The requirements for active listening are (1) intensity, (2) empathy, (3) acceptance, and (4) a willingness to take responsibility for completeness.
7. **Explain the behaviors necessary for providing effective feedback.** Behaviors that are necessary for providing effective feedback include focusing on specific behaviors; keeping feedback impersonal, goal oriented, and well timed; ensuring understanding; and directing feedback for improvement toward behavior that the recipient can control.

COMPREHENSION: Review and Discussion Questions

- 10-1. "Everything a supervisor does involves communicating." Build an argument to support this statement.
- 10-2. Why isn't agreement necessarily a part of good communication?
- 10-3. When is a written communication preferable to an oral one? When is it not preferred?
- 10-4. Which type of communication method do you prefer to use at work when sending a message to someone else? Why? Do you have the same preference when messages are being sent to you? Explain.
- 10-5. "Do as I say, not as I do." Analyze this phrase in terms of supervisors being effective communicators, and in terms of its effect on credibility and trust among the supervisor's employees.
- 10-6. How can nonverbal messages be powerful communicators? How can supervisors use nonverbal messages to their advantage?
- 10-7. What use, if any, can the grapevine serve? Provide a specific example.
- 10-8. Do you believe that supervisors can control the grapevine? Explain your position.
- 10-9. Contrast passive and active listening.
- 10-10. Why are feedback skills so important to a supervisor's success?

KEY CONCEPT CROSSWORD



ACROSS

2. the emphasis an individual gives to words or phrases in a speech
6. communication that is not spoken, written, or transmitted on a computer
7. the rumor mill in an organization
10. a receiver's translation of a sender's message
12. communication that addresses task-related issues
13. transference of meaning
16. training that focuses on making people more open and self-expressive

DOWN

1. communication that moves in any direction and skips authority levels
3. a measure of the amount of information that is transmitted
4. a technique that requires an individual to concentrate on what is being said
5. information received by the sender from a receiver regarding a message that had been sent
8. gestures and other personal movements that communicate emotions or temperaments
9. the conversion of a message into symbolic form
11. the medium by which a message travels
14. information that is being sent
15. behavior patterns that correspond to the positions people occupy in an organization

Developing Your Supervisory Skills

GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF

Before you can effectively supervise others, you must understand your present strengths and areas in need of development. To assist in this learning process, we encourage you to complete the following self-assessments from the Prentice Hall Self-Assessment Library 3.4.

- How Good Are My Listening Skills? (II. A. 2.)
- What's My Face-to-Face Communications Style? (II. A. 1.)

After you complete the assessment, we suggest you retain the results and store them as part of your "portfolio of learning about yourself."

BUILDING A TEAM

10-11. An Experiential Exercise: Practicing Listening Skills

This is a role-play to practice listening skills. Break into groups of three. One person will be the observer. They will evaluate the two other role players and provide feedback on their listening skills using the eight points listed in the section titled "Active Listening," which follows.

The second person will take the role of Chris Humphries. Chris is a regional sales supervisor with Hershey Chocolate who is spending the month recruiting on college campuses. Chris joined Hershey three years ago,

directly out of college, and went through the company's marketing management training program.

The third person in the group will take the role of Lee Pleasant. Lee is a college senior, graduating at the end of the semester.

Note to the role players: The role descriptions in this exercise establish each character. Follow the guidelines. Don't make up or change the facts you're given, but try to involve yourself in the character within the guidelines.

Situation

Preliminary interview (in a college placement center) for a marketing management trainee position with Hershey Chocolate. A brief job description and Lee's résumé follow.

Abbreviated Job Description

Title: Marketing Management Trainee—Chocolate Division
Reports To: Regional Sales Supervisor

Duties and Responsibilities: Completes formal training program at headquarters in Hershey, Pennsylvania.
 After training:

- Calls on retail stores
- Introduces new products to store personnel

- Distributes sales promotion materials
- Stocks and arranges shelves in stores
- Takes sales orders
- Follows up on complaints or problems
- Completes all necessary sales reports

Abbreviated Résumé

Name: Lee Pleasant
Education: B.S. in Business; GPA 3.6 (out of 4.0). Major: Marketing. Minor: Economics.
Work Experience: Worked fifteen hours a week during semesters and full-time during summer vacations at Barnes & Noble bookstore.
Honors: Dean's list (ranked in top 5 percent of business class).
Other: Intercollegiate tennis team (two-year letter winner); vice-president, College Marketing Club.

Stop!

The observer should read both Chris's and Lee's roles. The people playing Chris and Lee, however, should read only their own roles. After all have read their appropriate

roles, begin the exercise. You have up to fifteen minutes. When completed, the observer should provide feedback to both of the role players.

Chris Humphries's Role

You will be interviewing approximately 150 students over the next six weeks to fill four trainee positions. You're looking for candidates who are bright, articulate, and ambitious, and have management potential. The Hershey training program is eighteen months long. Trainees will be sales representatives calling on retail stores and will spend the first six weeks taking formal classes at Hershey's head

office. The compensation to start is \$37,500 a year plus a car. You are to improvise other information as needed. Examples of questions you might ask are the following: Where do you expect to be in five years? What's important to you in a job? What courses did you like best in college? Which did you like least? What makes you think you would do well in this job?

Lee Pleasant's Role

Review your résumé. You are a very good student whose previous work experience has been limited to selling in retail stores part-time while going to school and full-time

during the summers. This is your first interview with Hershey, but you're very interested in their training program. Fill in any voids in information as you see fit.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening requires you to concentrate on what is being said. It's more than just hearing the words. It involves a concerted effort to understand and interpret the speaker's message.

STEPS IN PRACTICING THE SKILL

STEP 1: Make eye contact. How do you feel when somebody doesn't look at you when you're speaking? If you're like most people, you're likely to interpret this behavior as aloofness or disinterest. Making eye contact with the speaker focuses your attention,

reduces the likelihood that you will become distracted, and encourages the speaker.

STEP 2: Exhibit affirmative nods and appropriate facial expressions. The effective listener shows interest in what is being said through nonverbal signals. Affirmative nods and appropriate facial expressions, when added to good eye contact, convey to the speaker that you're listening.

STEP 3: Avoid distracting actions or gestures that suggest boredom. The other side of showing interest

is avoiding actions that suggest that your mind is somewhere else. When listening, don't look at your watch, shuffle papers, play with your pencil, or engage in similar distractions. They make the speaker feel that you're bored or disinterested or indicate that you aren't fully attentive.

STEP 4: Ask questions. The critical listener analyzes what they hear and asks questions. This behavior provides clarification, ensures understanding, and assures the speaker that you're listening.

STEP 5: Paraphrase using your own words. The effective listener uses phrases such as, "What I hear you saying is..." or "Do you mean...?" Paraphrasing is an excellent control device to check on whether you're listening carefully and to verify that what you heard is accurate.

STEP 6: Avoid interrupting the speaker. Let the speaker complete their thought before you try to

respond. Don't try to second-guess where the speaker's thoughts are going. When the speaker is finished, you'll know it.

STEP 7: Don't overtalk. Most of us would rather speak our own ideas than listen to what someone else says. Talking might be more fun and silence might be uncomfortable, but you can't talk and listen at the same time. The good listener recognizes this fact and doesn't overtalk.

STEP 8: Make smooth transitions between the roles of speaker and listener. The effective listener makes transitions smoothly from speaker to listener and back to speaker. From a listening perspective this means concentrating on what a speaker has to say and practicing not thinking about what you're going to say as soon as you get your chance.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

- 10-12. Develop a two- to three-page report describing what you can do to improve the likelihood that your verbal communications will be received and understood as you intended them to be.
- 10-13. List the common communication shortcuts you use in text messaging or e-mails. Identify fifteen

acronyms and describe what they mean. How and when would these acronyms be used appropriately? What barriers might these acronyms create for a user? A receiver? Someone unfamiliar with texting?

THINKING CRITICALLY

► Case 10-A: Communication Problems at Ozark Corporation

March is the busiest time of the year at Ozark Corporation. Thus, when the production line in Section A has trouble for the second time in a week, Sam Case decides he'd better get it straightened out immediately. As the lead supervisor, Sam is directly in charge of Sections A and B.

Sam calls in Paul Banks, the new supervisor in Section A. Their conversation is as follows:

SAM: Paul, we seem to be having some problems in your section. The line has been down twice in the last three days. This is our busiest time of the year. We can't afford to have recurring problems of this type. I want you to stop that quality-control project I have you

working on, find out what the problem is out on the line, and get rid of it.

PAUL: Okay, I'll get out there, find out what's causing the problem, and get rid of it.

SAM: Fine.

A quick check of the line reveals that there was a problem with the automatic control unit. Paul checks and finds that it would take four hours to replace the unit. "If you put in a new one," the maintenance man tells him, "you won't have a problem with it for at least sixteen months. It's up to you. I'll do whatever you tell me." Paul tells the man to replace the automatic control unit.

By late afternoon the new unit is installed and the line is operating at full speed. However, the next morning, after Sam receives the previous day's production figures, he calls Paul in. "What happened in your section? I thought you were going to fix the problem."

"I did," Paul tells him. "The automatic control unit was giving us trouble, so I replaced it."

Sam's voice indicates that he is not happy with this decision. "You pulled the unit in the middle of a work-day? Why didn't you wait until the shift was over and have the unit pulled then? You could have done preventive maintenance to get through the rest of the day. You gave up two hours of production time to replace a unit that could have waited for maintenance."

Paul is shocked. He thought he had done the right thing. "Look, Sam," he says, "you told me to get rid of the problem and I did. You didn't say anything about preventive maintenance or not stopping the line."

► Case 10-B: A Pinch of This and a Dash of That

How do you combine two packaged-food companies, both with well-known household brand names, and make it work? That's the challenge managers at General Mills faced when it acquired Pillsbury. The company's chief learning officer, Kevin Wilde, said, "Let's get the best out of both of our marketing organizations. And let's not stop there." So they decided to identify, share, and integrate the best practices from both companies. And employee teams played a major role in how the company proceeded.

An intensive training program called "Brand Champions" was created and launched. The program was designed not just for marketing specialists, but for all employees from different functional areas who worked on particular brands. These cross-functional teams attended the in-house training together as a unified group. According to one of the program developers, Beth Gunderson, specific benefits of including these teams soon became evident. "A person from human resources, for instance, would ask a provocative question precisely because she wasn't a marketer. And you'd see the look on the marketers' faces: Whoa, I never thought of that." It helped employees understand and appreciate different perspectives.

Another benefit of including people from different functions was improved communication throughout the company. People were no longer griping about what other functional areas were doing. Employees began to understand how the other functional areas worked and how each area's contribution was important to the overall success of the company.

Sam realizes that the discussion is beginning to get out of hand. "Look, let's stand back and quietly discuss this matter." With that, the two men start discussing the matter from the beginning.

RESPONDING TO THE CASE

- 10-14. Analyze the communication between the lead supervisor, Sam Case, and the new supervisor in Section A, Paul Banks. What did Sam do wrong?
- 10-15. How could the problem have been prevented? In your answer discuss the requirement for active listening.
- 10-16. Discuss the barriers to effective communication. What should Sam and Paul learn from this experience that will make them better communicators and more effective supervisors?

The training program has been so successful that now General Mills' production plants have asked for a mini-version of the course. "They want to understand the language marketers speak and why things are done as they are." Oh... and one other example of how successful the program has been. Betty Crocker is well known for packaged cake mixes, but less so for cookie mixes. Inspired by input from the group, the cookie-mix team decided to go after scratch bakers. (These are people who bake from scratch rather than from a boxed mix. As one person said, they were "taking on grandma.") The cookie mixes were reformulated and now the brand owns 90 percent of the dry cookie mix category.

RESPONDING TO THE CASE

- 10-17. What barriers were there to communication between the employees of General Mills and Pillsbury?
- 10-18. Although not a "different language" per se, how might the language of the functional areas within the organization have interfered with communication?
- 10-19. How did the employee roles from the combined organizations impact the communication process?
- 10-20. As a supervisor, what suggestions would you offer to improve the communication between groups?

Sources: Based on L. Gratton and T. J. Erickson, "8 Ways to Build Collaborative Teams," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2007, 100-109; and J. Gordon, "Building Brand Champions," *Training* January/February 2007, 14-17.