



# **Communication Tools and Concepts**

**By**

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## **HUMAN SIDE OF ENTERPRISE**

- **Safety, Structure and Skills**
- **Assertive Communication**
  - **Behavior Feedback**
  - **Successful Listening**

**Communication Requirements: Safety, Structure and Skills**

### **Structure: Create Forums for Communication**

- Set up the forum for regular communication
- Establish the norm of open communication and guidelines for doing so in a constructive way
- Create a vision, and the plan to get there.
- Define roles; guidelines
- Create the opportunities to share in education, decision-making and handing-off responsibilities

### **Safety: Establish a Safe Environment**

- Establish ground rules which support openness
- Legitimize everyone's perspective: i.e. be respectful and appreciate differences of point of view
- Paraphrase! That demonstrates that you understand another's point of view
- Recognize that a trusting environment takes time
- Constructive confrontation
  1. Stay focused on issue
  2. Stay out of triangles: give feedback directly (e.g. behavior feedback)
  3. Create dialogue: share assumptions rather than conclusions.
- Keep the big picture in mind
- Use outside resources to help break the ice (particularly in discussing the undiscussables)

### **Skills: Develop the Skills and the Courage to Share Openly and Handle Conflict**

- To ask for information (and not overstep your bounds)
- To share information (without kids losing their incentive to work)
- To share feelings (without hurting someone's feelings, displeasing them and risk losing their approval or support)
- To share observations or beliefs (without stirring up conflict or rejection and risk much pain, loss of control or being cut-off)
- Learning skills in effective communication and problem solving and dialogue help. For example:
  - Listening Skills
  - Evaluation of our opinion

- Assertive communication (including behavior feedback)

## **Assertive Communication**

### **An Assertive Statement**

- indicates your feeling, wants and/or needs
- in an honest and direct fashion
- that is considerate of the feelings and rights of the other person.

### **Three-Part Assertive Response**

1. Empathy Statement
  - reflects what you believe they are saying and/or feeling
  - “I understand that ...”
2. Statement of Position
  - effectively indicates your feelings or position on the issue.
  - “However, I ...”
3. Statement of intent
  - what you would like to occur or plan to do.
  - “Therefore I ...”

### **Examples**

- “I know this may put a lot of pressure on you, but we are leaving in 2 hours and I must have the tickets.”
- “I understand that you are very anxious to see Mr. Jones today. However, at the moment there are no open times in his schedule, so there is no way that I can give you an appointment. I will set one up at the earliest opportunity.”

# SO WHAT YOU ARE SAYING IS...

## A Guide to Successful Listening

By  
Leslie Dashew

*Our effectiveness in all relationships depends upon our ability to communicate. Yet one of the most frequent issues in marriages, parent-child relationships, partnerships, schools, and businesses is the "the failure to communicate." When this phrase is heard, it most often refers to the reason for a mistake or the feeling that one has not been understood. In 25 years of working with people in all kinds of settings, I have found that the most common reason for this failure is the lack of well-developed listening skills. Chapter one, "So what you are Saying is.." describes one of the most useful strategies to improve your listening abilities and demonstrate your understanding of what has been heard.*

How do you know if someone has really heard you? When someone says "I Understand," what is it that he or she understood?

Have you ever wondered why voices get louder and louder and points-of-view get restated over and over again in a heated discussion?

Do you ever get frustrated when someone seems to be on a totally different wavelength or maybe takes off on a totally different tangent in a discussion that is important to you?

The challenges described above are common to most of us. Having confidence that your message was received as you intended it (i.e., effective communication) is a rare experience. Instead, most of us get frustrated, angry or (worse) repetitious when we find that people are not listening or "hearing" us.

### WHY IS IT SO HARD?

The process of listening is very challenging, and the odds are against our understanding one another unless we really work at it. There are a number of barriers, which interfere with understanding: three of them are listed below:

**Assuming you know the rest of the story.** A very common listening error is to hear the first part of the statement and assume you know the rest. Rather than patiently hearing the whole story, we interrupt and interject our own perspective prematurely. Sometimes we do know what someone is going to say, but often we miss an important

point in addition to rudely indicating by the interruption that our perspective is much more important than theirs.

**Words are symbols.** Words are symbols for images, ideas or objects and our use of words may conjure up a picture in the listener's mind that is different than the one, which the speaker has in mind. Consider the simple example of ordering a steak cooked "medium-rare." In some restaurants, meat cooked medium-rare looks as if it was just cut off the cow, while at others, it has a gray-brown coloring with no signs of pink. We attribute different meaning to words. Often, we falsely assume that others hold the same meaning as ours, and this, too, contributes to misunderstanding.

**Internal and external distractions.** We are all susceptible to distractions while listening, such as noises or activity in our immediate environment. These are what I describe as "external" distractions since they are outside of us. Internal distractions can be just as disruptive to the listening process. These distractions include growling stomachs, emotional reactions to the speaker or his words, or going off in our own heads, thinking about something sparked by the speaker, but causing us to lose track of his or her words. In either case, distractions often contribute to our missing important aspects of a speaker's message and can leave us with a false or incomplete understanding.

A key element of most miscommunication is our assumption that we fully and accurately understand the speaker. With all the inevitable barriers to communication, this is rarely a safe assumption.

The single most effective tool to enhance listening skills and understanding is to confirm your understanding with a reflective response.

### **PARAPHRASING: REFLECTING YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

If you practice the following listening rule, your listening ability will improve 100%.

#### **Leslie's Golden Rule**

After hearing someone complete a statement, reflect back your understanding of the message to confirm that you have accurately heard the speaker before adding your perspective or response.

Paraphrasing, the most common reflective response, is simply re-stating another's message in your own words. When you paraphrase you:

- Let that individual know that you are interested in understanding accurately his perspective, thereby demonstrating your interest and concern for him.

- Verify that your understanding is correct, or have the opportunity to revise it if you have misunderstood.
- Let the person know that her message has been received, so that she no longer needs to press her perspective and, typically, will be more open to listening to yours. You reduce defensiveness and build trust.
- Demonstrate your understanding, rather than claiming it.

Typical paraphrases begin in the following way:

“So what you are saying is...”

“If I understand you correctly....”

“In other words....”

“To summarize, then....”

“Let me check out my understanding...”

Or, you may give an example that illustrates the speaker’s point (called “advancing a tentative example”). For instance, “Would a pin-striped suit without cuffs be the type of apparel you are recommending?” If the speaker responds with “Exactly!” you know that you have heard him correctly.

When you paraphrase, in essence you are testing yourself. Most of us pay closer attention to a teacher’s words when we know that we are going to be tested. Thus, if you commit yourself to “Leslie’s rule” and practice regular reflective responses, you will find that you are paying closer attention to the speaker..as if you were taking a test. You will also find that this practice increases your ability to overcome distractions, to determine what meaning the speaker attributed to her words and to refrain from interrupting.

Paraphrasing is important even when you think the statement you have heard is simple or straight forward. Your judgment may be based on misunderstanding. Even if you “go overboard” with paraphrasing you probably won’t be doing it as often as needed. The experience of hundreds of participants in my Listening Skills Workshops indicates that paraphrasing increases effectiveness, efficiency and relationships on and off the job.

“So Leslie, what you are saying is that we should paraphrase whenever we listen to anyone.”

“EXACTLY!”

## PARAPHRASING

### Pay Careful Attention to

- *WHAT* the speaker is saying
- *HOW* the speaker is delivering the message

### Then *IN YOUR OWN WORDS*

Reflect back what you have heard.

### Examples:

“So what are saying is....”

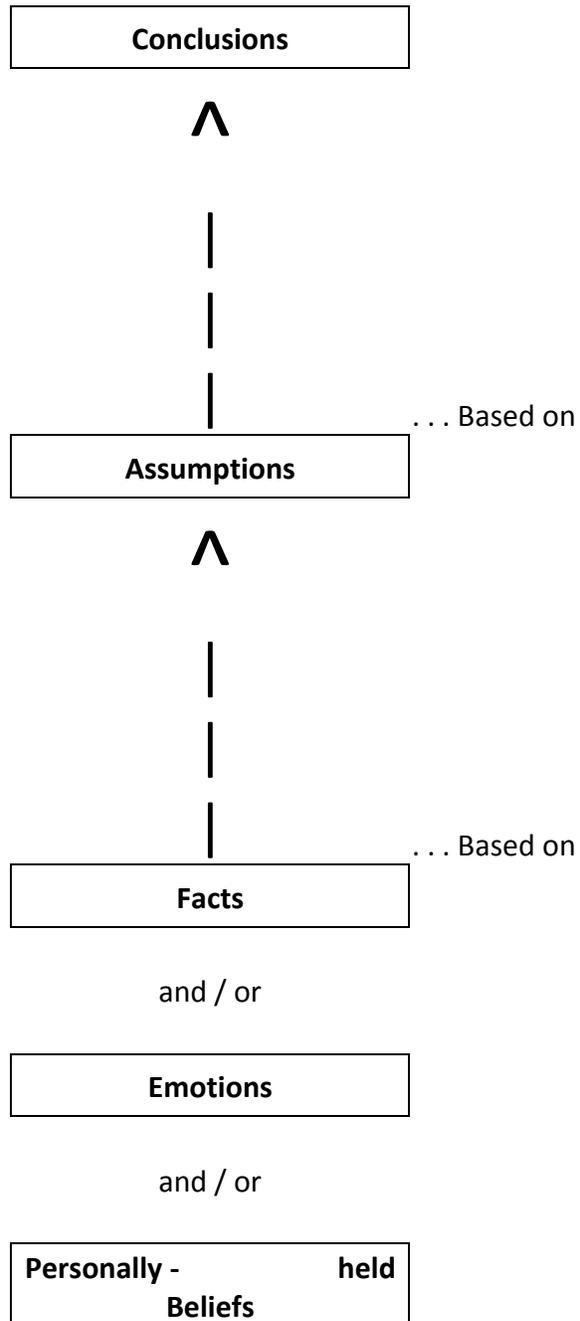
“In summary, then, you...”

“What I hear you saying is...”

“In other words,...”

“So you are really....because.....”

# EVALUATION OF OUR OPINIONS



Before you voice your opinion, consider your underlying assumptions and where they came from: do you have adequate facts? Are they based on emotions or "irrational" beliefs? Should you ask more questions before you draw a conclusion?