

## CHAPTER 2

# Improving Personal and Organizational Communications

### CHAPTER PREVIEW

After studying this chapter, students should be able to

1. Explain the communication process.
2. Identify and explain the filters that affect communication.
3. Identify ways to improve personal communication, including developing listening skills.
4. Understand how communications flow through an organization.
5. Learn how to effectively use communication technologies.

### PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE

It is important for the student to realize that maintaining effective communication is the major challenge of most organizations. Impersonal communication is a one-way process designed to present facts, instructions, and the like. Interpersonal communication is a two-way exchange in which the receiver understands the message in the same way as the sender intended. Both the sender and the receiver are responsible for making sure that the message is clearly understood. Our language is filled with words that can have a variety of meanings depending on the context of the message. Every message sent or received will experience adjustments to its meaning because of our communication filters: semantics, emotions, language and cultural barriers, attitudes, role expectations, nonverbal cues, and gender-specific focus.

Students can learn to improve their communication skills by using repetition, choosing words carefully, and timing messages appropriately. They can learn to be aware of the listening climate in each situation and develop active listening skills. High-tech communications systems such as e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging are changing the way individuals within organizations exchange information.

### PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- I. Communication in an Information Economy
  - A. The Battle for our attention
- II. The Communication Process
  - A. Impersonal versus interpersonal communication
  - B. Sender-message-receiver-feedback
- III. Communication Filters
  - A. Semantics
  - B. Language and cultural barriers
  - C. Emotions

- D. Attitudes
- E. Role expectations
- F. Gender-specific focus
- G. Nonverbal messages
  - 1. Eye contact
  - 2. Facial expressions
  - 3. Gestures
  - 4. Personal space
- H. Who is responsible for effective communication?
- IV. How to Improve Personal Communication
  - A. Send clear messages
    - 1. Send clear messages
    - 2. Develop effective listening skills
      - a. Active listening
      - b. Critical listening
      - c. Empathetic listening
- V. Communications in Organizations
  - A. Formal channels: Vertical and Horizontal
  - B. Informal channels: The Grapevine
  - C. Improving upward Communication
- VI. Communication Technologies
  - A. Social media
  - B. Mobile communication
  - C. E-mail
    - 1. Know your company's e-mail policies
    - 2. Create an appropriate e-mail address
    - 3. Use the *Subject:* line
    - 4. Compose clear, concise messages
    - 5. Recognize e-mail limitations
  - D. Blogs

## CAREER INSIGHT EXERCISE

Students will benefit from understanding that while business in North America is characterized by informality, too much informality during the job interview process can cause problems.

## TRY YOUR HAND EXERCISES

1. Students can keep a journal of their observations of non-verbal behavior and share them with the class.
2. Students can print out their recent emails and analyze them according to the email tips given in the chapter.
3. Students should list the number of times they stop listening and interject their own stories.

## CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

### CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE: **Analyze It**

Answers will vary according to students' experiences. Encourage students to identify the communication filters (see Fig. 2.2) in their daily conversations.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE: **Apply It.**

Completion of the self-assessment exercise will provide students with information needed to develop goals for self-improvement. After recording a response to each item, students select a skill or attitude they would like to improve and describe the steps they will take to achieve this goal.

## YOU PLAY THE ROLE EXERCISE

This role play is designed to enhance awareness of the filters that alter or aid a message between a sender and a receiver in the communication process. Ask students to form pairs and be prepared to discuss specific information about their present or past work situation. Give approximately 3–4 minutes following the exercise for students to write down their insights as to whether or not they felt the other person really listened to what was being said. Open the large-group discussion with students sharing their findings.

## CASE QUESTIONS

### BELOW THE SURFACE: **Improving Safety Factors at BP**

1. Students will discuss the steps that could have been taken to give workers a voice in accident prevention. They should identify the filters that distorted upward communication.
2. Students can discuss the reasons that top management was more interested in personal safety than in process safety.

### CLOSING CASE: **Should Employers Restrict Social Media Use?**

Students can discuss where employers should draw the line with respect to social media use by employees. They can outline the policies they would put in place for the use of social media.

## ADDITIONAL APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. "He did not say she sent the text message." Repeat this sentence aloud eight times, each time putting the emphasis on a different word. How does the varied emphasis change the meaning of the sentence?

*Note to the Instructor:* Have eight different individuals read the sentence in class. Start with the emphasis on the first word: "*He* did not say she sent the text message"; then the second word: "He *did* not say she sent the text message"; then the third word: "He did *not* say she sent the text message"; and so on.

After each reading, briefly discuss with the class the change, if any, in the meaning of the sentence. This exercise should point out a potential communication breakdown when only written communication is available.

2. Read a story or simply talk into a videotape recorder. Then play back the tape and consider how you could speak more clearly or vary your voice tone or inflections to make your speech more easily understood or more interesting to listen to.

*Note to the Instructor:* You may want to set up various business situations that students are likely to encounter on the job, preferably situations that involve phone use. They may need to handle an angry customer, a request for service, or their boss's need for information. Record the students' voices and play back the conversations, again analyzing how the students can alter their tone or inflections to convey the best impression.

3. The purpose of this role play is to help students learn how to recapture the attention of someone who is not being a good listener. Introduce students to the problem of listening "blocks" and discuss the information below. Then ask one class member to play the role of job interviewer and ask another person to play the role of job applicant. Prepare the interviewer to assume the role of someone who is preoccupied and displaying several listening blocks. Encourage the job applicant to use various methods to improve communication.

## Introduction to Listening Blocks

1. Throughout life there are situations where we desperately want another person to listen carefully to what we say. For example, you have a personal problem and seek advice from a friend. As you discuss your problem, it becomes obvious that your friend is preoccupied and not listening closely to what you are saying. Another example might be a job interview situation. Just as you begin discussing some of your major strengths, it becomes clear that the interviewer is not paying attention. When faced with this communication problem, you need to do something. There are "blocks" to listening and you need to take appropriate action when these barriers to communication surface during a conversation. A few typical blocks follow:

- **Mental holiday:** The person is daydreaming or focused on thoughts that have nothing to do with the current conversation.
- **Judging:** The person is focused on your clothing, tone of voice, posture, or hair style and is ignoring the conversation.
- **Rehearsing:** The person is busy thinking about a reaction to your comments and is ignoring what you are currently saying.

If the person seems only slightly distracted, try making eye contact, varying your speech pattern, or asking questions. If the person seems completely preoccupied, you may want to reschedule the meeting.

2. When a customer, patient, or client complains about something, we have an opportunity to improve relations and build greater loyalty if we respond in the correct manner. Any indication of indifference may result in a lost customer. The purpose of this exercise is to give students practice in responding to customer concerns. Read one of the following statements and then instruct a member of the class to stand and give a verbal response. Ask other members of the class to assess the response and give the person feedback. Keep in mind that the appropriate response will require the right combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. For example, tone of voice and body language must complement the spoken word.
- "After I checked out of the hospital and returned home, I discovered that some personal items were missing. I think a member of your staff stole these items and I want you to reimburse me for my losses."

- “One of your waiters was very rude to my wife who had lunch at your café yesterday. What should have been a pleasant lunch with friends was ruined by the young man’s attitude.”
- “Today my expense account payment request was returned by our accounting department. The person who checked my form says your hotel made an error, and I was overcharged. My request for travel expense reimbursement will not be processed until I turn in a corrected invoice. I need that money today!”