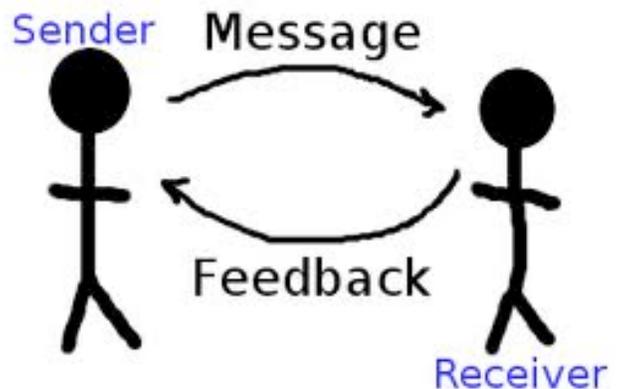

What's Your Communication Attitude?

“What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

Why has that famous line from *Cool Hand Luke* become such a popular cultural catch phrase? Probably because it so aptly describes one of our most common frustrations - miscommunication!

Communication is essential for progress. We do not live in a vacuum; we can accomplish very little without effectively communicating with others. Constantly and by necessity we communicate with many people every day. While communication is plentiful, good communication is rare. Why?



A key limitation to communication are the attitudes about the process that each person (sender and receiver) have about the process. When I ask people; “As a percentage who is responsible for the success of any communication process, the Sender or the Receiver?”, most respond that it’s 50/50. Sounds reasonable and fair right? But is it effective?

What if everyone in your organization had the attitude that they were 100% responsible for the effectiveness of every conversation regardless of whether they were sending or receiving? What would be different? What changes would there be to how well things get done, or how people get along?

So you’ve decided to be responsible for making sure that every communication opportunity is 100% effective, now what? Here are nine principles that will help you become that person. Pay attention to how many are related to speaking and how many are related to listening:

- **Be logical.** The human mind functions in a very orderly fashion. It can only concentrate on one thought at a time. If you attempt to communicate a number of ideas quickly or in an illogical sequence, your listener will have great difficulty understanding you. Before presenting a complex idea, write down the key points in a logical sequence, or share your key points with a friend to help ensure that you will clearly understood.
- **Be alert.** The human mind converts words into pictures, but the same words can create different pictures because words mean different things to different people. You must consciously be alert to the pictures your words paint in the minds of others. Imagine a scenario in which a real estate agent is telling the prospective buyer that the kitchen in a house for sale has just had a new terrazzo floor installed. The agent can’t understand why the buyer is turned off. While the agent visualizes a beautiful easy to maintain floor, the buyer is visualizing sore feet from standing on a cold hard surface! Ask questions to get a glimpse into the picture that is being formed in their mind.



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- **Be brief.** When it comes to words, more is rarely better. Too many words clutter up communications. The purpose of communication is to convey a message and elicit a behavioral response. Don't try to impress people with fancy jargon. Keep your communication logical, brief, clear, and concise. Ask yourself "What would Abe say." Remember, Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* captured and communicated the essence of our country's past, present, and future... in the span of less than eight minutes!
 - **Take time to listen.** Often we are so preoccupied in our busyness that we only pretend to listen. Take the time to really concentrate. Listen with both ears. You'll be surprised at how much you'll learn!
 - **Be quiet.** Grant speakers, or senders, the respect that they and their ideas deserve by offering them your full attention. People tend to repeat the things that are important to them, so listen with the intent to understand. Maintain eye contact. Looking over a person's shoulder or continuing to work while someone is talking to you will cripple the communication process and curtail a relationship.
 - **Listen with an open mind.** Selective listening (hearing only what matches your views and interests) limits your ability to learn, grow, and achieve. Listening with an open mind increases your ability to understand and respond effectively. Your openness will create such noticeable rapport that the other person will be inclined to listen to you with equal sensitivity.
 - **Listen for emotions.** Concentrate on the emotions that are being expressed... not just the words. People communicate emotion through the pitch, intonation, hesitation, and speed of delivery of their speech. They also express feelings through body language. By listening to *what* people say and *how* they say it, you will discover the feelings behind the words that are more important than the words themselves!
 - **Listen for retention.** Have you ever wanted to relate a story or a joke you heard, but couldn't remember it? Well, there is a way that can help you remember more, more often. While you are listening to a talk or conversation, occasionally summarize in your mind the highlights of what you are hearing. Verbalizing your summarized thoughts from time to time will help confirm with the speaker the accuracy of communication. The sender will appreciate your carefulness... as long as your purpose is to ensure understanding rather than to impress.

Practice these principles in every communication situation, no matter how important, with an attitude of taking 100% responsibility for the outcome... whether sending or receiving... and reap the powerful rewards in your personal, professional, and organizational lives!