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Chapter 2 Focusing on Interpersonal and Group Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how behavioral theories about human needs, trust and disclosure, and motivation relate to business communication.
2. Describe the role of nonverbal messages in communication.
3. Identify aspects of effective listening.
4. Identify factors affecting group and team communication.
5. Discuss aspects of effective meeting management.

Chapter Overview

Behavioral theories form the conceptual basis for business communication. Nonverbal communication, listening, and group communication are essential interpersonal skills for success in today's organizations. A team is a group with a clear identity and a high level of member commitment. Groups and teams communicate via both traditional and electronic meetings, which must be managed successfully to insure that organizational goals are met.

Key Terms

Agenda 34	Norming 31
Brainstorming 34	Performing 31
Casual listening 25	Product development team 31
Consensus 35	Quality assurance team 31
Cross-functional team 31	Role 27
Directive behavior 23	Status 27
Empathetic listening 26	Storming 31
Forming 31	Stroke 22
Intensive listening 26	Supportive behavior 23
Interpersonal intelligence 20	Task force 31
Listening for information 25	Total Quality Management 23
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Norm 31	Vocal kinesic communication 24

Chapter Outline

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PowerPoint Slides

- **Lecture Slides** — Students can review key chapter concepts on the Lecture slides (found on the companion website (Student’s Resources)). Slides can be downloaded for convenient printing of handouts for taking class notes.
Slide Number and Title
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 2. Learning Objectives
 3. Behavioral Theories Impact Communication
 4. Nonverbal Communication Adds Meaning
 5. Understanding Nonverbal Messages
 6. Effective Listeners . . .
 7. Characteristics of Effective Groups
 8. Stages of Team Development
 9. Suggestions for Effective Meetings
- **E-lectures** — Slides with engaging narration of key concepts—useful as reinforcement of lectures and exam reviews—are available through the CourseMate site for BCOM3.
- **Resource Slides** — A larger deck of slides for instructors for displaying in the classroom; these slides for class enrichment and solutions to activities and applications are also available at the companion website (Instructor’s Resources) and on the Instructor’s CD.

Slide Number and Title

1. Chapter 2 Focusing on Interpersonal and Group Communication
2. Learning Objectives
3. Learning Objective 1 Explain how behavioral theories about human needs, trust and disclosure, and motivation relate to business communication.
4. Behavioral Theories Impact Communication
5. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
6. Johari Window: Trust Leads to Reciprocal Sharing
7. McGregor’s Management Styles
8. Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model
9. Organizational Development and Small Group Effectiveness
10. Learning Objective 2 Describe the role of nonverbal messages in communication.
11. Nonverbal Communication Adds Meaning
12. Metacommunication
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14. Understanding Kinesic Messages
15. Understanding Nonverbal Messages
16. Learning Objective 3 Identify aspects of effective listening.
17. Effective Listeners . . .
18. Bad Listening Habits
19. Learning Objective 4 Identify factors affecting group and team communication.
20. Communication in Flat Organizations
21. Characteristics of Effective Groups
22. Group Roles
23. Types of Teams
24. Stages of Team Development
25. Team Behaviors
26. Learning Objective 5 Discuss aspects of effective meeting management.
27. Face-to-Face Meetings
28. Electronic Meetings
29. Suggestions for Effective Meetings

Teaching Suggestions

Learning Objective 1

Explain how behavioral theories about human needs, trust and disclosure, and motivation relate to business communication.

BEHAVIORAL THEORIES THAT IMPACT COMMUNICATION

An effective way to show the importance of each of the behavioral theories discussed is to relate them to modern organizations.

Resource Slide 4: Behavioral Theories Impact Communication

- Have students visit the Ritz-Carlton corporate website at <http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com/en/About/GoldStandards.htm> and learn about the company's Gold Standards. Discuss how these standards make for a superior customer experience.
- Other organizations and their practices can be used as examples in describing this and other theories. Ask students for input about companies with which they are familiar.

Recognizing Human Needs

Display visuals as you discuss Maslow's needs hierarchy and relate it to McGregor's management styles.

Resource Slide 5: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- a. Managers who practice Theory Y help satisfy workers' social and ego needs. By satisfying these needs, people gain in personal maturity, which helps lead to trust in management.
- b. In contrast, managers who practice Theory X tend to assume that workers are concerned only with satisfying lower-level physiological and security safety needs so these managers fail to assist in people's efforts to satisfy higher-level needs.

Resource Slide 7: McGregor's Management Styles

Stroking and the Johari Window

Display the Johari Window or direct students' attention to Figure 2-1.

- a. Trust in another leads to a person's willingness to disclose personal feelings, beliefs, and problems. Trust in others results from need satisfaction and from mature treatment at work.

- b. The Johari Window visual provides a means to show how trust leading to self-disclosure helps enlarge the free or open area and, in turn, decreases the size of the blind and hidden areas. Self-disclosure leads to further trust and to a higher level of interpersonal “sharing.”

Resource Slide 6: Johari Window: Trust Leads to Reciprocal Sharing

Resource Slide 9: Organizational Development and Small Group Effectiveness

Contrasting Management Styles

Show the visual and point out that Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model emphasizes using different management styles based on the situation and who the participants are. The **directive behavior** they describe occurs when a supervisor gives detailed rules and instructions to an employee and then monitors him or her closely. The **supportive behavior** they describe occurs when leaders listen, communicate, recognize, and encourage rather than dictating.

Resource Slide 8: Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational and Leadership Model

In addition to focusing on McGregor’s Theory X, you might discuss William Ouchi’s Theory Z.

- a. Theory Z, also known as Japanese style management, is marked by a strong bilateral commitment of employer and employee, life-long employment, and slow decision making based on consensus.
- b. Total Quality Management (TQM) is consistent with Theory Y and Theory Z since the contribution of the individual is emphasized.
- Assign Activity 1 and ask students to relate their personal communication experience to the class.
 - Assign Question 1 of “Digging Deeper” and ask students to focus on one theory and list specific actions managers can take, based on that theory, to improve communication with employees.

Learning Objective 2

Describe the role of nonverbal messages in communication.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Show the visuals to illustrate the different components of nonverbal communication. Remind students that nonverbal includes everything except the actual words that occur in an interaction.

Resource Slide 11: Nonverbal Communication Adds Meaning

Resource Slide 12: Metacommunication

Resource Slide 13: Kinesic Communication

- Ask students to watch an interaction from a distance, involving people they do not know. Have them analyze the kind of interaction they viewed, based only on what they could see from a distance (they could not hear the words). How much could they decipher? Emphasize that what they learn about the people and the situation is based only on nonverbal behaviors.
- Ask students about what they plan to wear when they begin their professional careers after college. Consider showing photos of casual dress, business casual dress, and business professional dress. (Some images may be found at

http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/tp/dress_code_collect.htm

Remind students that they should “dress for the job they want, not the job they have.”

- Assign Application 2 and discuss in class.
- Show the slide and discuss how different kinesics messages can have different meanings to different people, based on culture, background, gender, age, etc. Ask students for examples of situations where they have misread body language or where their body language has been misunderstood.

Resource Slide 14: Understanding Kinesic Messages

Overcoming Barriers Created by Nonverbal Messages

Demonstrate several nonverbal signals and have students write down what they perceive to be their meanings.

- a. You might include some of the following: folded arms, raised eyebrows, scratching the head, hands on hips, shrug of shoulders, etc.
- b. Have students share their perceptions. Were there differences in what students perceived? Explain. How might those signals be interpreted differently when accompanied with various word messages?

Resource Slide 15: Understanding Nonverbal Messages

Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication

- Ask students to consider how other cultures might react to nonverbal messages. Discuss the possible reactions and encourage students to share other examples.
- Assign Application 5 and discuss in class.

Learning Objective 3

Identify aspects of effective listening.

LISTENING AS A COMMUNICATION SKILL

Aspects of Effective Listening

Because of its pervasive nature, listening should be a concern of other disciplines in addition to business communication. In the business communication course, listening instruction should be related to interpersonal and group communication and interviewing practices.

Listening for a Purpose

- Discuss the different types of listening: Casual listening; Listening for information; Intensive listening; and Empathetic listening
- Discuss and give examples of the different reasons for listening:
 - To interact socially, such as talking with your colleagues about weekend plans.
 - To receive information, such as calling a vendor to obtain a price for an item.
 - To solve problems, such as discussing with your team members why work must be completed earlier than you had planned.
 - To share feelings with others, such as hearing how a co-worker is tired of the two-hour commute to work everyday.
- Assign Activity 3 and discuss in class.

Bad Listening Habits

- Display the slide listing bad listening habits.

Resource slide 18: Bad Listening Habits

- Ask students to work in small groups to discuss a situation they have faced that provides evidence of bad listening habits. Ask each group what specific suggestions they could provide that would improve listening in this situation.
- Ask a member of each group to share listening suggestions with the class. Use these class presentations to lead into a discussion of speaker and listener responsibilities.
- Lead students in a discussion of how to overcome bad listening habits.

Suggestions for Effective Listening

- Discuss effective listening guidelines. To help students identify listening weaknesses and develop a plan for improvement:
 - Have students answer Review Question 5, noting their listening weaknesses.
 - Assign Case Assignment 1. The related activities focus on a self-diagnosis of listening habits and the development of a plan for improvement.

Resource slide 17: Effective Listeners...

- Require students to keep a listening log for 21 days, the time needed to break a habit. They should record what they did each day to break the bad listening habits which were identified (daydreaming, interrupting the speaker, prejudging the subject, etc.). Have students give a short report at the end of the three-week period, summarizing their outcomes.
- Assign students to read a current article about a topic of your choice and give a short (two- or three-minute) presentation. Instruct the class to listen attentively but not to take notes. You might direct the speaker to incorporate one or more of the listening distractions in his/her presentation. Prepare three to five questions to ask the class about the material (either multiple choice, true/false, or short answer) to assess their listening effectiveness.

Learning Objective 4

Identify factors affecting group and team communication.

GROUP COMMUNICATION

Increasing Focus on Groups

- Lead students in a discussion of how communication in flat organizations differs from that in traditional organizations. Emphasize the need for more lateral (horizontal) communication and how that can be accomplished.
- Display the visuals as you discuss the following:
- Discuss the barriers that include role vs. status, excessive competition, flat organizational structures that pose new requirements for communication flow.
- When mid-level positions are eliminated, communication must be redirected.

Resource slide 20: Communication in Flat Organization

Characteristics of Effective Groups

- Show the slide while discussing characteristics of effective teams. To illustrate the importance of common goals, ask students what happens in a team project in which two members want to make an “A” and the other two members are satisfied with a “C.”

Resource Slide 21: Characteristics of Effective Groups

- Ask students what size team they prefer for completing school projects, giving reasons for their preference.
- Ask students to recall a negative team experience they may have had at school or work. Which of the characteristics were lacking in that situation?

Group Roles

- Project the visual as you discuss team roles. Which roles are positive? Which are negative? Can an individual group member play more than one role?
- Ask students to think of a group of which they are members (family, club, church, etc.) and to identify persons in that group who play each of the discussed roles. Ask students about which negative group roles are the most difficult to control or manage? Which ones are tolerable?

Resource slide 22: Group Roles

From Groups to Teams

- Project the slides and lead a discussion of different types of teams. Remind students that becoming a team is a process that does not occur simply because a group is put together by a manager or supervisor. For a group to become a team, it must go through a development process with four distinct phases—forming, storming, norming, and performing. All teams will not reach their optimum performance level but will settle for the acceptable performance that comes in the norming stage.

Resource slide 23: Types of Teams

Resource Slide 24: Stages of Team Development

- Assign Application 1. Discuss how corporate team-building has changed and how companies are using off-site physical and mental activities to make on-site teamwork more effective.
- In small groups, have students brainstorm a list of recommendations for using teams effectively. As each team reports its list, record the recommendations on the chalkboard or overhead.
- Show the visuals as you discuss team behaviors. Newly formed groups often find it helpful to set aside time to define their purpose, expectations, and roles.

Resource Slide 25: Team Behaviors

Learning Objective 5

Discuss aspects of effective meeting management.

MEETING MANAGEMENT

- Have you ever heard someone say “I have been in meetings all week, and we haven’t accomplished anything!”? Managers often spend up to 60 percent of their time in meetings that can sometimes turn into a free-for-all. Effective meetings don’t just happen; they occur because the organizer engages in careful planning and attention to specific guidelines.
- Show the following slides while discussing the relative advantages and limitations of face-to-face and electronic meetings.

Resource slide 27: Face-to-Face Meetings

Resource Slide 28: Electronic Meetings

- Discuss collaborative and videoconferencing technology that allows meetings to happen electronically, without the financial and logistical issues that can come with trying to schedule meetings when people are separated geographically.
- If your school has a distance learning or extension area, see if you can schedule time in the unit’s videoconferencing classrooms to allow your students to experience the technology. Place two groups of students in different classrooms and let them communicate with each other. Discuss the issues of microphone and camera placement and the need to look at the camera, not necessarily the projection screen.

Suggestions for Effective Meetings

Show the slides and ask students for other suggestions for making a meeting productive.

Resource Slide 29: Suggestions for Effective Meetings

Chapter Review

1 What is meant by stroking? How does it affect interpersonal communication in the workplace?

(Obj. 1)

Stroking is a transactional analysis term for identifying the way others give recognition to a person. It can be in the form of a pat on the back from the supervisor, a congratulatory message, or being listened to. Receiving strokes is essential to a person's mental and emotional well-being. By staying aware of this fact, managers can greatly improve communication and people's attitudes toward their work.

2 When a manager says to an employee, "May I see you in my office," what are some of the possible metacommunications? (Obj. 2)

Some possible metacommunications (both positive and negative) are as follows: "You have not been performing up to our company's standards so we are letting you go. "You had the best sales presentation of the entire staff, so you will receive a 10 percent bonus this month, if the client selects our firm." Your workplace dress is inappropriate, and you must begin adhering to our company dress policy." What an employee expects and the metacommunication inferred depend completely on the past interactions with the manager and on what has happened most recently.

3 What roles do culture and gender play in nonverbal communication? (Obj. 2)

Nonverbal messages have different meanings from culture to culture, and men and women from the same culture typically exhibit different body language. Such nonverbal behaviors are learned through the example of others.

4 How is the activity of listening impacted by the particular situation? (Obj. 3)

People satisfy a variety of purposes through listening, including social interaction, receiving of information, problem solving, and sharing of feelings. Each activity calls for a different style of listening.

5 Discuss six bad listening habits. Which do you think is the biggest challenge for you personally? (Obj. 3)

Bad listening habits include faking attention, allowing disruptions, overlistening, stereotyping, dismissing subjects as uninteresting, and failing to observe nonverbal aids. Personal responses of students will vary.

6 What is a possible cause of most conflict between or among groups? (Obj. 4)

Lack of understanding about the nature and roles of other persons or groups is a possible cause of most conflict between or among groups. This shortcoming is a communication problem that leads to conflict.

7 How are a group and a team different? (Obj. 4)

The main difference between groups and teams are in member attitudes and the levels of commitment.

8 Discuss how a flat organizational structure affects communication. (Obj. 4)

In a flat organization, communicating across the organizational chart becomes more important than communicating up and down in a top-heavy hierarchy. Communication is enhanced because the message must travel shorter distances. Much of the communication is face to face.

9 What are some factors to consider in deciding whether to hold a face-to-face meeting or an electronic meeting? (Obj. 5)

Geographic dispersion, familiarity of participants with one another, and technical capabilities of participants should all be considered in deciding whether to hold a face-to-face or an electronic meeting.

10 Why are records such as agendas and minutes important to group success? (Obj. 5)

An agenda provides a plan for the meeting to keep everyone informed and to provide for orderly activity. Minutes provide a written record of meeting actions to assure that necessary tracking, follow-up, and implementation occur.

Activities

Teaching Suggestions and Possible Solutions

1 Applying Behavioral Theories to Communication Situations (Obj. 1)

Considering Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the Johari Window, McGregor’s Theory X and Y, and Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership theory, select one of the theories and relate it to a personal communication experience you have had. How was communication enhanced or worsened by the events and behaviors that occurred? What were the ethical implications of the situation? Prepare a brief written summary of your analysis.

In analyzing student responses, focus on the creative application of the behavioral theories to practical situations.

2 Understanding the Importance of Nonverbal Messages (Obj. 2)

In small groups, compose a list of nonverbal messages (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) that might be used by a businessperson, along with their meanings. What are some possible ways that each might be misinterpreted?

Nonverbal	Possible Meaning	Misinterpretation
Steepling hands.	I am propping my arms on the table because I am tired.	I am better than you.
Covering mouth with hand when talking.	I think I have bad breath.	I am lying; I have no confidence in what I am saying.
Not making eye contact.	The sun is in my eyes.	I am lying; I am not confident in what I am saying.
Standing while everyone else is sitting.	My back hurts, and I need to stretch.	I have authority over you.

3 Identifying Appropriate Listening Styles (Obj. 3)

Identify a situation you have experienced that would be appropriate for each of the following listening styles: casual listening, listening for information, intensive listening, and empathetic listening. Describe how you could maximize your listening experience in each case.

After reading student responses, summarize their suggestions for maximizing their own listening. Challenge each student to target several of the suggestions for personal implementation.

4 Identifying Deterrents to Group Success (Obj. 4)

In small groups, discuss negative group situations in which you have participated. These groups could be related to school, organizations, sports teams, performing groups, etc. Referring to the chapter information, identify reasons for each group’s lack of success. Make a list of the most common problems identified in the team. Compare your list with that of other small groups in the class.

Responses will vary. Students should focus on a lack of common goals, misunderstood role perceptions, group size, or lack of leadership as reasons for groups not succeeding.

5 Analyzing a Meeting for Effective Behaviors (Obj. 5)

Attend a meeting of an organization of your choice. Compare the activities of the attended meeting with the “Suggestions for Effective Meetings” presented in the chapter. Email your instructor, describing the meeting attended and summarizing how well the meeting reflected the chapter suggestions and how it might have been more effective.

Responses will vary. Students should focus on how well the meeting manager (a) limits the running time of the meeting, (b) sets the agenda and distributes in advance, (c) encourages participation, (d) maintains order, (e) manages conflict, (f) seeks consensus, and (g) aids in preparing thorough minutes.

6 Assessing the Professional Value of Interpersonal and Group Communication Skills (Objs. 1-5)

Considering your career goal, select the three concepts presented in the chapter that you feel will be most important to your professional success. Write a one-page summary, justifying and explaining your selections.

Responses will vary. This activity is most effective when teaching students who are close enough to graduation to be considering specific positions for which they might apply. Consider pairing this assignment with Chapter 1, Activity 1 where student shadow a business manager for a day and log communication activities. Students also could assess his/her use of interpersonal and group communication skills.

Applications

Teaching Suggestions and Possible Solutions

Read

1. Have students read the following article, which describes the importance of team development activities:

Linley, A. (2008, January 29). Our top ten team building exercises. Ezine. Available at <http://ezinearticles.com/?Our-Top-Ten-Team-Building-Exercises&id=955336>.

Ask students to form small groups in which they should discuss the shift in corporate team building over the past two or more years and the value gained from various types of team-building activities. Students should brainstorm ways that they believe these approaches could be used to boost the effectiveness of teams in an academic setting and the projected results. Afterwards, they should share their ideas with the class in a short presentation. (Obj. 1 & 4)

Responses will vary. Consider using the activities listed in your class with teams you organize for class projects. Divide the students into different teams for each activity you choose. Have students complete the activity and then complete a team debriefing to analyze strengths and weaknesses.

2. Have students read the following article, which gives useful suggestions ensuring that nonverbal behavior communicates the intended message:

*Shephard, L. C. (2007, May 1). Reading body language can offer insight to HR pros. *Employee Benefit News*. Available from Business Source Complete database.*

Instruct students to expand the list of recommended and nonverbal messages and the interpretations mentioned in the article. They should then share their list with the class, complete with demonstrations, in an informal presentation. (Obj. 2)

Presentation formats will vary. Encourage students to be creative by setting up a mock job interview and having both the interviewer and interviewee exhibit positive and negative nonverbal behaviors. Or ask one group to model negative behaviors and the other to model positive behaviors. Additions to the list in the article might include talking with a hand over the mouth, which can be interpreted as lying or lack of confidence; standing while everyone else is sitting, which can be interpreted as a sign of implied superiority; and sitting away from everyone else in the room, perhaps with an extra chair between, which can be interpreted as purposeful isolation.

Write

3. Assign students to keep a journal over a period of two to five days that records events involving metacommunication. Describe how each incident influences the understanding of the verbal message involved. (Obj. 4)

Encourage students to share with the class or small groups their organizational chart depicting the external communication system of an organization. Good examples may be drawn from workplace peer groups, student organizations, social groups, athletic teams, academic departments, and religious groups. Discuss the formal hierarchies as they compare to informal power structures.

Think

4. Ask students to consider a distance learning conference or course in which they have participated. How were nonverbal communication, listening, and other factors different from what they have experienced in traditional class settings? How do their experiences relate to the conducting of electronic meetings? (Obj. 2, 3, & 5)

Have students discuss their impressions about the distance interaction and identify the relative advantages and disadvantages.

Speak

5. Have students locate one or more articles from a database or the Internet that discuss nonverbal communication in various cultures. Assign them to create a list of examples of body language and behaviors that have different meanings among cultures. Then lead the class in a discussion of how ignorance of these differences might affect interpersonal communication. (Obj. 2)

Encourage students to share their findings in small groups and compile a list of gestures that have different meanings. Have each group share one or two gestures with the class and discuss the various meanings.

Collaborate

6. Assign students to groups of three to five, and have each team visit the website of the Institute for Performance Culture at <http://teaming-up.com>. The groups should take the survey that can be found in the Free Resources menu tab, under “Your team’s performance blind spots?” Some of the items may not relate to the short-term project team but will provide students with ideas of issues faced in real-world work teams. After taking the survey, each group should discuss the evaluation report produced from the survey. Have each group send the instructor an email summarizing what the team survey revealed and how they will use the information to improve team performance. (Obj. 4)

When student teams take this survey, ask them to click the “Next” tab at the end of the survey. Students should consider the five types of groupings outlined on the website. Email messages about this activity should focus on what the teams learned about themselves as individuals and about how they work together as a team. They should also outline some strategies for improving themselves as a team.

Digging Deeper

1 How can managers use Maslow’s need levels, the Johari Window, and the management theories of McGregor and Hersey and Blanchard to improve communication with employees?

Knowledge of these theories will aid managers in supervising their employees more effectively. A manager can help employees meet needs in Maslow’s order and therefore motivate them to perform better. For example, employees can better reach their fullest potential [self-actualization] with confidence that the manager supports/understands them. By using the theories of the Johari Window, a manager can help increase what is in the free and open area by maintaining open communication with an employee. A manager can analyze employees to see which ones work better with more supervision and less control (Theory X or directive behavior) and which ones work better under less supervision and more control (Theory Y or supportive behavior).

2 How do effective conversation and listening impact a business’ overall success?

Businesses are impacted by effective conversation and listening skills because employees who listen are more likely to be well-liked and to work more effectively than employees who are not. Conversation skills are important because conversation means communication, and effective communication is essential to a business’ long-term success.

3 Why do some teams never reach the highest stage of team development? What can be done to overcome the obstacles to peak team performance

Teams fail to reach the highest performance stage because of lack in one or more of the 4 C’s: Commitment, Cooperation, Communication, and Contribution. For instance, a team could fall short of the performing stage because of a lack of commitment to common goals. Or a team could stall because the personality styles of each team member have not been explored and their roles have not been well defined. Poor communication can result in low team performance, as can the lack of quality contribution by one or more members.

Cases

Teaching Suggestions and Possible Solutions

CASE ASSIGNMENT 1: Is Anyone Listening?

This case allows students to explore the vital importance of listening in the workplace and identify and implement a plan for improving their listening skills.

The ability to listen effectively is consistently rated as one of the most important skills necessary for success in the workplace. A survey of North American executives reveals that 80 percent believe that listening is one of the most important skills needed in the corporate environment. The same survey participants, however, also rated the skill as one of the most lacking. Effective listening is crucial to providing quality service, facilitating groups, training staff, improving teamwork, and supervising and managing for improved performance. In times of stress and change, effective listening is the cornerstone of workplace harmony, since it furthers interpersonal and intercultural understanding. Listening is more than just hearing. It is an interactive process that takes concentration and commitment.

Although listening is critical to our daily lives, it is taught and studied far less than the other three basic communication skills: reading, writing, and speaking. Overreliance on television and computers also contributes to our listening problems. Much of the trouble we have communicating with others is because of poor listening skills. Studies show that we spend about 80 percent of our waking hours communicating, and at least 45 percent of that time listening. Most people can benefit from improving their listening skills. You can arrive at a fairly accurate assessment of your listening skills by thinking about your relationships with the people in your life—your boss, colleagues, best friends, family. If asked, what would they say about how well you listen? Do you often misunderstand assignments, or only vaguely remember what people have said to you? If so, you may need to improve your listening skills. These suggestions may assist you in your listening improvement:

- Become aware of biases and filters that keep you from listening effectively.
- Identify the aspects of listening that you need to improve upon.
- Get comfortable with silence.
- Monitor your body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signals that might appear negative.
- Listen between words for feelings.
- Give signals that you are listening.
- Take notes.
- Hear people out before cutting in with your reply.
- Don't begin answers with "I."
- Learn to ask nonaggressive questions.
- Understand that listening does not mean agreeing.

Listening skills can have a dramatic effect on your personal and professional success. By becoming an effective listener, you're likely to gain the trust of those with whom you communicate. The resulting relationships will lead to better workplace environments, better customer relations, and better community relationships.

Sources: Hughes, L. (2002). How to be a good listener. *Women in Business*, 54, 17; Bruner, B. R. (2008). Listening: Communication & trust: Practitioners' perspectives of business/organizational relationships. *International Journal of Listening*, 22, 73–82.

Questions

1. **Tell why you are either a good or poor listener. Support your conclusion with reasons and/or evidence.**

Students should include information about poor listening and/or inappropriate listening styles.

2. **One of the sites you visited identified a plan for improving the listening skills of a negotiator. Prepare a similar plan for a position in your chosen career field (human resources manager, auditor, salesperson, etc.), adapting the points to fit the activities and expectations of the position.** Students should incorporate guidelines for effective listening with adaptations that are appropriate for the selected career field.
3. **Outline and implement a plan for improving your own listening skills. Your plan should include the following: (1) identification of your major listening weaknesses; (2) one or more strategies for overcoming each of the stated weaknesses; (3) activities or occasions in which you applied the corrective strategies, with dates and times; and (4) outcomes of your corrective strategies. Implement your plan for one week, or some other time period as specified by your instructor. Summarize in writing the results of your self-improvement project.**

Students' solutions will vary.

CASE ASSIGNMENT 2: WellPoint Embraces a Service Culture

This case highlights how WellPoint is emphasizing diversity and service as part of corporate culture, providing straightforward, honest, and transparent communication at every organizational level, and giving back to the community it serves. The activities at the end of the case have students research the charitable activities and vision of WellPoint as compared to other companies.

As the nation's largest health benefits company, WellPoint provides health insurance to nearly 35 million members. One in nine Americans is covered by WellPoint's affiliate companies, operating as Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans in 14 states. WellPoint attributes much of its success to a strong commitment to core values that guide strategy and operations. Putting the customer first and conveying that philosophy through the products and services offered is the driving force. Integrity and personal accountability for excellence are emphasized, and associates are encouraged to take ownership for high performance achievement. The motto "one company, one team" reminds employees of the need to collaborate with others to achieve results.

According to the WellPoint website, the company's mission is "to improve the lives of the people we serve and the health of our communities." Management and associates demonstrate commitment to their mission through notable community involvement. Recently, WellPoint Inc. associates generously pledged more than \$15 million to more than 9,000 not-for-profit organizations, with the WellPoint Foundation matching at 50 percent. WellPoint's Community Service Day is another way employees give back through volunteering in a variety of ways, most of which involve community health, in 140 cities spanning 30 states. Contributions of time, talent, muscles, and money help address needs throughout local communities.

In 2008, *DiversityInc* magazine ranked WellPoint among the Top 50 Companies for Diversity. This distinction recognizes the company's ongoing commitment to advancing diversity, such as promotion of a supplier base that includes businesses owned by minorities, women, and disabled veterans. WellPoint also reaches out to diverse audiences, promoting effective communication through its Spanish websites as well as tools for seniors seeking conversations with younger family members about end-of-life care. According to CEO Angela Braly, "Focusing on diversity helps us to better understand and meet the health care needs of the unique communities we serve—while actually becoming part of their cultural fabric."

WellPoint was named in 2008 to the top five in the 100 Best Places to Work in Healthcare by *Modern Healthcare* magazine. The list recognizes companies that excel in leadership and planning, culture and communications, job role satisfaction, working environment, relationship with supervisor, training and development, pay and benefits, and overall associate satisfaction. WellPoint also received recognition for two years straight as one of America's Most Admired Companies by *Fortune* magazine. Understanding employee motivation and focusing on excellence has enabled WellPoint to become a leader in the health care industry.

Sources: Matthews, C. S. (2008). Community service day. *Profiles in Diversity Journal*, 10(4), 42; Delaney, S. (2008, October 28). Senn Delaney congratulates WellPoint on being named one of the best places to work in health care. Senn Delaney Leadership Consulting Group, LLC. Retrieved from www.sennnelaney.com/news_WellPoint.html; Braly, A. (2009). Diversity at WellPoint: Welcome statement. Retrieved from www.wellpointdiversity.com; O'Hara, K. J. (2007, September). Guided by principles: How Angela Braly leads WellPoint based on clear goals and a strong sense of purpose. *Smart Business*. Retrieved from www.sbnonline.com/Local/Article/12852/82/0/Guided_by_principles.aspx?Category=112

Activities

1. Have students visit the WellPoint website at www.wellpoint.com. Once there, have them click on "Our Business" and choose the link to view the company mission, vision, and values.
2. Locate the following article about WellPoint's community service. Then locate an article discussing the community service of another organization of your choice. Compare the level of involvement and overall impact of the two organizations' community efforts.

Matthews, C. S. (2008, July/August). Community service day. *Profiles in Diversity Journal*, 10(4), 42. Available from Business Source Complete database.

3. Ask students to post their findings to a discussion board, following your directions.

In these activities, students are asked to research the charitable activities and vision of WellPoint as compared to other companies. WellPoint specifically emphasizes contributing manpower and funds to non-profit organizations. In April 2008, 3,000 WellPoint employees volunteered time to more than 220 projects in 140 cities around the nation. According to the company website, "WellPoint's mission is to improve the lives of the people we serve and the health of our communities." The company focuses on five core values:

1. Customer First
2. Integrity
3. Personal Accountability for Excellence
4. One Company, One Team
5. Continuous Improvement