

0 Introduction

Most of our projects and activities need a certain degree of interaction with other human to be turned into reality. Mastering communication increases the chances that you reach great results interacting with your surroundings.

This training program aims at providing you the elements for developing your understanding about communication, your listening skills and for capitalizing on feedback.

The content of this document has been designed to support the development of the participants of BEST Training Day 1 – Communication. For further information, please do contact the trainers.

1 Content

0 INTRODUCTION	2
1 CONTENT	2
2 COMMUNICATION BASICS	4
2.1 COMMUNICATION PROCESS MODEL.....	4
2.2 LADDER OF INFERENCE.....	4
2.3 COMMUNICATION BARRIERS.....	5
3 LISTENING	6
3.1 LEVELS OF LISTENING.....	6
3.1.1 <i>Not Listening</i>	6
3.1.2 <i>Pretending</i>	7
3.1.3 <i>Selective Listening</i>	7
3.1.4 <i>Attentive Listening</i>	7
3.1.5 <i>Empathic Listening</i>	8
3.2 THE 4 EARS.....	8
3.2.1 <i>Factual information</i>	9
3.2.2 <i>Self-statement</i>	9
3.2.3 <i>Relationship indicator</i>	9
3.2.4 <i>Appeal</i>	9
3.3 LISTENING TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS.....	9
3.3.1 <i>HEARING THE MESSAGE</i>	10
3.3.2 <i>INTERPRETING THE MESSAGE</i>	10

3.3.3	<i>EVALUATING THE MESSAGE</i>	10
3.3.4	<i>RESPONDING TO THE MESSAGE</i>	10
3.4	5 WAYS TO LISTEN BETTER.....	11
3.4.1	<i>Silence</i>	11
3.4.2	<i>Mixer</i>	11
3.4.3	<i>Savouring</i>	11
3.4.4	<i>Listening Position</i>	11
3.4.5	<i>RASA</i>	11
4	EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK	12
5	REFERENCES	12
5.1	BOOKS.....	12
5.2	Web.....	12

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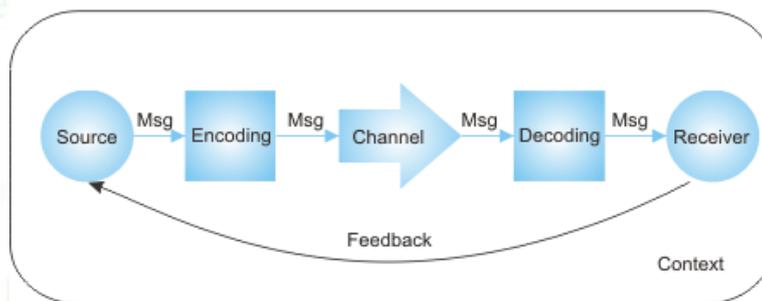
2 Communication basics

2.1 Communication process model

Communication is the process of **sharing our ideas, thoughts and feelings with other people and having those ideas, thoughts and feelings understood** by the people we are talking with. When we communicate we speak, listen, and observe.

This process is divided in several steps as it is shown below. It is composed by a sender (source) and a receiver. The communication comes with the interaction between both in which the sender encodes a message through a channel, that is decoded by the receiver. The receiver can respond to the message by providing feedback, and giving his/her own opinion and thoughts.

The Communications Process



2.2 Ladder of inference

The communication process involves the way how we **perceive the message**, and it can be explain by the **Ladder of Inference**. It says that our brains are firstly absorbing a big amount of data every moment and based on the data, we then take action and come to conclusions. So this is what happens:

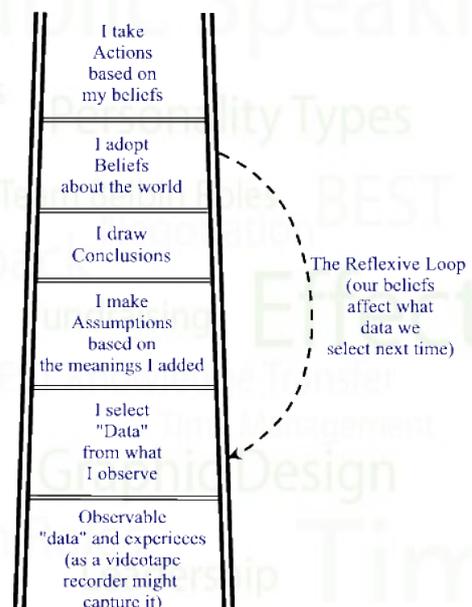
Step 1: our brain pick up pure data. Everything is captured. At this moment, there is no meaning to it. It's just data.

Step 2: from what we observe (the data in step 1) we start to filter and select specific pieces of it.

Step 3: we start to add meaning to the data, base on our experiences and believes of the world.

Step 4: we then draw conclusions from the meaning we have added to the data.

Step 5: we then adopt beliefs of the world.



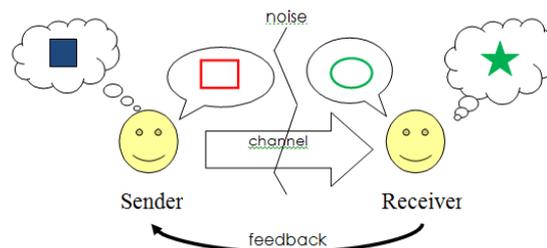
Step 6: we take action based on those beliefs.

One example on how we can perceive the same thing in different ways is the Rorschach test. It is a psychological test composed by drawings, called inkblots, in which subjects perceptions of those inkblots are analysed through different psychological interpretations. This test is used to examine a person's personality characteristics and emotional functioning. The inkblots Rorschach test are below.



2.3 Communication Barriers

Is the communication always easy? What can make the message not so clear? What are the main communication barriers/obstacles?



Indeed it is not so easy and sometimes a big effort should be done to remove those barriers, or just to decrease their impact on the communication process. Here comes the main 7 barriers to a **good communication**.

1. **Physical:** time, environment, comfort, needs, physical medium
2. **Perceptual:** viewing what is said from your own mindset
3. **Emotional:** personal feelings at the moment
4. **Cultural:** ethnic, religious, and social differences)
5. **Language:** different languages or vocabulary, accents
6. **Gender:** distinct differences between the speech patterns in a man and those in a woman. A woman speaks between 22,000 and 25,000 words a day whereas a man speaks between 7,000 and 10,000. man talks in a linear, logical and compartmentalised way while woman tends to mix logic with feelings.
7. **Interpersonal:** Rituals, pastimes, working

Example: How comfortable do you speak on the phone when you are in a bus, and when you are home?

3 Listening

"The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Listening is the "receiving" part of communication. Making meaning from sound is an active process that includes:

1. Receiving information
2. Understanding
3. Evaluating the message
4. Giving feedback to the sender.

When executed effectively, listening:

- improves relationships between people;
- results in making others good listeners as well;
- improves problem solving skills;
- increases job satisfaction;
- improves communication, trust, respect among team members;
- builds teamwork.

3.1 Levels of Listening

There are different types of listening. Typically they are presented as **levels of listening**.

Various people have constructed listening models. Below is an attempt to encompass and extend good current listening theory in an accessible and concise way. Bear in mind that listening is rarely confined merely to words. Sometimes what you are listening to will include other sounds or intonation or verbal/emotional noises. Sometimes listening involves noticing a silence or a pause - nothing - 'dead air' as it's known in broadcasting. You might instead be listening to a musical performance, or an engine noise, or a crowded meeting, for the purpose of understanding and assessing what is actually happening or being said. Also, listening in its fullest sense, as you will see below, ultimately includes many non-verbal and non-audible factors, such as body language, facial expressions, reactions of others, cultural elements, and the reactions of the speaker and the listeners to each other.

3.1.1 Not Listening

Noise in the background - you are not concentrating on the sounds at all and nothing is registering with you. Ignoring would be another way to describe this type of listening. There is nothing wrong with passive listening if it's truly not important, but passive listening, Not Listening, is obviously daft and can be downright dangerous if the communications are important.

3.1.2 Pretending

You are not concentrating and will not remember anything because you are actually daydreaming or being distracted by something else even though you will occasionally nod or agree using 'stock' safe replies.

This is a common type of listening that grown-ups do with children. This level of listening is called **Responsive Listening** in some other models, although **Pretending** is arguably a more apt term, since the word 'responsive' suggests a much higher level of care in the listener, and Pretending reflects that there is an element of deceit on the part of the listener towards the speaker.

You will generally know when you are pretending because the speaker will see that glazed look in your eyes and say firmly something like, "Will you please listen to me? I'm talking to you!"... Especially if the speaker is a small child.

3.1.3 Selective Listening

You are listening and taking in a certain amount of information, but because you already have such firm opposing or different views, or a resistance to the speaker, you are not allowing anything that is said or any noises made to influence your attitude and level of knowledge and understanding. You are projecting your position onto the speaker and the words.

You would do this typically because you are under pressure or very defensive. You would normally be aware that you are doing this, which is a big difference between the next level and this one.

3.1.4 Attentive Listening

You listen only to the content, and fail to receive all the non-verbal sounds and signals, such as tone of voice, facial expression and reaction of speaker to your own listening and reactions.

This is fine when the purpose of the communication is merely to gain/convey cold facts and figures, but it is very inadequate for other communications requiring an assessment of feelings and motives, and the circumstances underneath the superficial words or sounds.

Attentive Listening is a higher level of listening than Misunderstood Listening because it can gather reliable facts, but it fails to gather and suitably respond to emotions and feelings, and the situation of the other person, which is especially risky if the other person's position is potentially troublesome. This is a common form of listening among 'push and persuade' sales people. Attentive, Data-Only, Listening is typically driven by a strong personal results motive. It can be highly manipulative and forceful. This type of listening wins battles and loses wars - i.e., it can achieve short-term gains, but tends to wreck chances of building anything constructive and sustainable.

3.1.5 Empathic Listening

You are listening with full attention to the sounds, and all other relevant signals, including:

- tone of voice
- other verbal aspects - e.g., pace, volume, breathlessness, flow, style, emphasis
- facial expression
- body language
- cultural or ethnic or other aspects of the person which would affect the way their communications and signals are affecting you
- feeling - not contained in a single sense - this requires you to have an overall collective appreciation through all relevant senses (taste is perhaps the only sense not employed here) of how the other person is feeling
- you are able to see and feel the situation from the other person's position

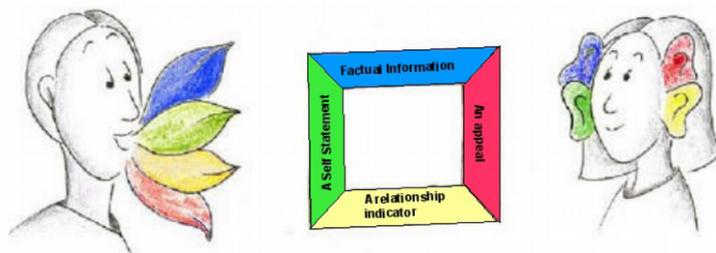
You are also reacting and giving feedback and checking understanding with the speaker. You will be summarising, probably taking notes and agreeing on the notes too if it's an important discussion. You will be honest in expressing disagreement but at the same time expressing genuine understanding, which hopefully (if your listening empathy is of a decent standard) will keep emotions civilized and emotionally under control even for very difficult discussions. You will be instinctively or consciously bringing elements of effective communication and empathy into the exchange. It will also be possible, for one who knows, to interpret the exchange from the perspective of having improved the relationship, mutual awareness and understanding.

3.2 The 4 ears

The communication square is the most familiar, and by now the most widespread, model by Friedemann Schulz von Thun. This model also became known as the 'four-ear-model'. The four levels of communication are not just significant for private companionship, but especially for the vocational domain—where the professional and human are constantly interlocking.

When I, as a human, make a statement it has four different effects. Each of my statements contains, whether I want it or not, four messages simultaneously.

- Factual information (which I am informing about) – blue,
- A self-statement (what I show of myself) – green,
- A relationship indicator (what I think of you and how I relate to you) – yellow,
- An appeal (what I want you to do) – red.



Therefore, Schulz von Thun represented the four sides of a statement as a square and attributed four beaks to the sender and four ears to the receiver. From a psychological

perspective, when we communicate 4 beaks and 4 ears are participating on both sides; the quality of the conversation depends on the manner in which these interact.

3.2.1 Factual information

On the factual level of the conversation the factual information stands in the foreground, here the focus is on dates, **facts**, and factual content. For the factual level there are three applicable criteria: the truth criteria of true or false (correct/not correct), the criteria of relevance (are the listed facts relevant/not relevant for the present issue, and the criteria of sufficiency (are the listed factual indicators sufficient for the issue or do many other things also need to be considered?)

For the sender it is therefore important to clearly and coherently communicate the factual content. The receiver, who has opened his factual ear, listens to the dates, facts, and circumstances and has many opportunities to follow up according to the three criteria mentioned above.

3.2.2 Self-statement

When somebody provides a statement, they also provide a part of themselves. Therefore every statement contains, whether one wants it or not, a **self-statement**, an indication of what is going on inside of me, what I am feeling, what I stand for and how I conceive my role. This can happen explicitly ('me-messages') or implicitly. This circumstance turns every message into a small tasting of one's personality, which can be of some concern to the sender, not just during examinations and encounters with psychologists.

While the sender is using the self-statement beak, implicitly or explicitly, to provide information about him, the recipient is taking it all in with the self-statement ear: What does this tell me about the other? What kind of person is s/he? What is their disposition? Etc...

3.2.3 Relationship indicator

Whether I want to or not: when I address somebody I also let them know (through formulation, intonation, expression) what my **relationship** is towards them and what I think of them—in any case in regard to the actual content of the conversation.

In every statement there is also a relationship indicator, for which the recipient often has an especially (overly) sensitive relationship ear. On the basis of this ear one decides: 'How do I feel treated by the way in which the other is treating me? What does the other think of me and how do they relate to me?'

3.2.4 Appeal

When somebody addresses another person, they usually wish to have an effect, have an influence; not just reach the other but to achieve something with them. Open or closed, this level is about desires, **appeals**, advice, instructions, effects, etc. Hence the appeal ear is especially open to the question: 'What should I do, think, or feel now?'

3.3 Listening techniques and tools

Listening leads to effective communication. Effective listeners HEAR and SELECT information from the speaker, give it meaning, determine how the speaker feels about it

and respond in a matter of seconds. Only in this way is it possible to frame listening. It requires an ability to LISTEN for FEELINGS as well as words.

3.3.1 Hearing the message

1. Listening actively

Concentrate for the main theme of the discussion and specific ideas and facts. Be alert and ask questions. Check your posture. Sit up straight and look directly at the speaker.

2. Listen objectively

Understand the speaker's point of view. Put aside your biases (resentments, personal objectives, conflicts, interests, etc.) on a topic.

3. Listen analytically to the presentation

Recognise the theme, then the key ideas, the supporting facts and other details.

3.3.2 Interpreting the message

4. Listen to the sender's meaning for words

Come to a mutual understanding of the speaker's meaning. Good listeners know that a matchup in meaning is a match-up in understanding.

5. Determine the main points

Look for the structure of the message and mentally review the material that has gone before. The main points can come at the beginning, middle or end of a message. Usefulness of the message can be determined through the main points.

6. Understand the non-verbal cues

Gestures, facial expression, eyes and postures are non-verbal cues or body languages that either confirm or deny the message of the words and tone of voice. Ask for clarification or repetition if you are not sure of the speaker's meaning.

3.3.3 Evaluating the message

7. Listen with empathy and understanding

Gather all of the key information before forming an opinion. Weigh and analyze all of the evidences before making a decision. An empathic listener puts himself in the source's shoes and understands the problem from the sender's point of view.

8. Suspend judgment

Avoid making judgment about the speaker or the message. Understand the speaker's intent in what he wants to convey. Respect and recognize his point of view. Paraphrase or clarify if you are not sure of what he has said.

3.3.4 Responding to the message

9. Provide feedback

Listeners must provide feedback to the speaker in order to complete the communication process. An active listener will try to inform the speaker that he has heard, understood and evaluated appropriately the main message. A good feedback should be relevant and timely. It should be based on facts and should relate to what's happening at that time.

10. Control your emotion

As listeners, you may experience different levels of emotion to what the speaker says. "Loaded" words or statements can make you react emotionally. To control this, you must identify what triggers you, understand your responses and develop the ability to listen objectively and attentively without interrupting.

3.4 5 ways to listen better

3.4.1 Silence

Simple as it may seem, the most important thing to remember is stop talking. Silence helps to reset and recalibrate your ear.

3.4.2 Mixer

In a crowded place, to actively pay attention to how many individual sound channels you can hear from the mix. This exercise might help you to improve the quality of your listening.

3.4.3 Savouring

Paying attention to mundane sounds can be very interesting as these are all around you all time and can provide some information.

3.4.4 Listening Position

To gain the ability to move your listening position to what is appropriate: from active to passive, from reductive to expansive, from critical to empathic. This will help you to get conscious and develop your personal responsive palette and tune better to message senders.

3.4.5 RASA

Rasa is the Sanskrit word for Juice and the acronym in terms of communication stands for:

Received – pay attention to the person

Appreciate – ensure you're listening

Summarise

Ask questions afterwards

The conversation between the message sender and the message receiver is a delicate dance. Even though your goal may be to simply hear the message, it requires give and take from both parties from the beginning stages of the communication process down to the last word.

4 Effective Feedback

As a **leader** in BEST, you will be expected a lot from. Whatever the position, **you** are there to **make things work**. For this you will need a lot of tools. Some you will learn during this trainshop, others you will learn or develop on your own. What is important is that you do this pro-actively and you are aware of the changes you need to produce.

Effective Feedback is one of the best tools you have for *motivating people, improving work efficiency, developing others, creating a proper work environment, creating synergy and connection* in your team. In the right hands and with the proper perception, this tool can do wonders. But, as any skill, giving and receiving feed-back is something that has to be learned, practiced, improved; it is a skill you develop in time.

There are several aspects that a true leader must master: **giving** and **receiving** feedback developed extensively bellow. Experience shows that receiving feedback in a professional way might prove harder than giving it, but this is something up to each to discover.

An additional angle to deal with feedback for leaders is the individuals' development which should be the main goal:

- **Constructive**

Feedback should be set to direct followers towards and/or to help determining where and how to take corrective action in order to improve.

- **Positive**

Feedback should help increase followers' confidence, encourage continued high performance and leverage what they're already doing effectively.

Constructive feedback can:	Positive feedback can:
1. Help identify where and how to take corrective action	1. Reinforce appropriate behavior and performance
2. Help align expectations and priorities	2. Help build a sense of achievement
3. Increase self-awareness	3. Enhance internal motivation
4. Fill in gaps in knowledge	4. Help build trusting relationships
5. Help build trusting relationships	5. Increase self-awareness

Ultimately, followers need to know where they have to improve and what they should keep doing to achieve individual and organisational goals.

5 What is feedback?

Feedback is a piece of information provided by an agent (in our case a leader) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. It is meant to provide:

- corrective information
- encouragement
- chance to evaluate (other point of view)
- clarifying ideas
- recognition for good work

Feedback is a "consequence" of performance. Often, it is the most realistic indicator of how well a task was completed. Moreover, it is a "self-esteem" vitamin! :) Always, it should be useful and meaningful to the receiver, something that they can use for their benefit: it's essentially a gift, so make it a gift as well.

Besides personal feedback described above, feedback can also be given to groups.

6 Preparations / Before giving feedback

Before talking to someone about their observed behaviour/performance, it is important to ask yourself whether:

1. The person understands what their task/role is; how do you know?
2. The person fully understands your expectations in terms of quality and quantity of work; expected attitude; professional behaviour; how do you know all these?
3. The person had performed well in a similar task in the past. If not, were they made aware at the time? If they received proper feedback, why hasn't anything changed? Or if something changed – how and to what extent? If yes, what do you think has caused the dip in performance?
4. The person is over/under qualified for the task they were assigned;
5. The person knows that there is a problem (in case you have identified one and would like to bring it up);
6. You or others in the organisation are contributing to the problem.

7 Giving constructive feedback

When you are giving feedback, there are some useful rules you could follow (DOs) and some things you should try to avoid (DON'Ts).

DOs:

- Ask whether you can deliver your feedback now.
- Give feedback in private - directly to the person concerned.
- Give feedback as soon after performance as possible, but not when the people are still emotionally engaged.
- Be specific and use concrete examples. Refer to behaviour.
- Be clear about what you want to say.
- Include positive perceptions and feelings. If you can't find anything positive to say, it's time to look in the mirror. (Feedback does not equal criticism in the negative sense)
- Communicate perceptions as perceptions and feelings as feelings, not as facts.
- Formulate feedback as precise and possible and detailed enough.
- Ask questions for understanding summarize and express your support.
- Take ownership on the feedback you are giving: use „I“.

DON'Ts:

Try to avoid these as they can demotivate, be disrespectful and generally can make things even worse. So:

- Don't refer to the person as such, but to their behaviour and especially to behaviour that can be changed.
- Don't judge.
- Don't use words that indicate a generalization such as "all", "always", "never", etc.
- Don't forget that it is you who is giving the feedback and hence you owe it: use "I" statements.
- Don't sugar-coat negative feedback.
- Don't postpone/avoid the conversation until you've "had it up to here".
- Don't give positive feedback without specific elements.
- Don't mistake valid reasons for excuses.
- Don't tell someone you know what's going on inside their head.
- Don't give feedback only when there is a problem. -> people will learn that after "you are a real team player, ...", you will follow with ", BUT ..."
- Don't use sarcasm to make a point.

Finally, feedback should work vice versa; your partner should be able to answer the same way.

Though:

...if you are giving feedback to get something off your chest then you are not really giving feedback. Feedback should help a person develop further and assess correctly what their actions imply. Don't take it on them if you are angry or unhappy – your feelings are yours and they don't help others become better.

...if you are giving feedback that is related to poor/inappropriate performance, make sure you are clear about what exactly you would like to see changed. State your requirement and expectations and also state what will happen if they are not met.

Feedback giving process:

- Ask if the receiver is ready to listen.
- Present the **specific facts/actions/behaviour** you want to feedback.
- Explain what you were **feeling** due to that behaviour.
- Tell **how** these feelings due to the behaviour **personally affected** you or **your work**.
- Provide **suggestions** on how the person can **improve** the behaviour.

8 After giving feedback

Follow up (check if the identified problems were dealt with and the behaviour/performance were improved). Don't expect to see an instant change: feedback is information that needs to "sink in" and not an instruction list. However, to speed up the change you could keep an eye open for everything that's getting them closer to improving the situation and assert it.

9 Receiving feedback

As already mentioned, feedback is information; it can sometimes be surprising, even causing strong emotional outcomes. However, there are a few golden rules on how to receive feedback.

DOs:

- Listen, don't interrupt.
- Ask for clarifications if you feel you need any.
- Thank for the feedback.
- evaluate feedback for yourself and follow up if needed

DON'Ts (try not to...):

- get defensive
- prove them wrong
- feel you have to do something to change yourself
- give an answer to justify yourself
- dismiss the information

- feel helpless to do anything about what you heard
- change the focus and attack the speaker
- generalise the message and feel bad about everything/ think you're perfect in all aspects

If you want more feedback, ask for it – the more people you ask the more informed you'll be! Also, by asking as many people as possible, you can make a balanced decision regarding the information that's coming your way.

But remember that not everyone knows how to give good, constructive feedback. If instead of feedback you get criticism, use questions to guide the other person through the process of giving feedback.

Feedback receiving process:

- **Say** if you are ready to receive it.
- **Listen** and **smile**.
- **Ask for clarifications if you need any.**
- **Thank for the feedback.**

10 References

10.1 Books

- Mastering Communication, Nick Stanton
- 7 habits of highly effective people, Stephen R. Covey
- Rule #1 Stop talking, Linda Eve Diamond
- The lost art of listening, Michael P. Nichols
- Giving and perceiving performance feedback, Peter R. Gaber

10.2 Web

- <http://www.systems-thinking.org/loi/loi.htm>
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