

## CONFESSION NUMBER FIVE: *You're Not The Most Important Person In The Conversation*

### ***Worth Remembering...***

*“Reflective back talk increases a leader’s ability to make good decisions.”*

*– Warren Bennis (b. 1925-)*

**C**ommunication is everything. If the other person doesn’t receive the message the way that you intended — then whatever you said — means absolutely nothing. Effective communication takes two — The sender and the receiver.

We aren’t born good communicators but we can learn to be. You may not have shared Martin Luther King’s views — or Bill Clinton’s for that matter — but you can’t deny that they had the ability to inspire people to action simply by the spoken word. (The Art of Communication.) Managers must have that same ability in order to accomplish goals and objectives with and through others.

If you can’t communicate effectively — then you can’t manage — period! In this chapter I’ll explain the steps you’ll need to take to become a more effective communicator and how to train yourself to become a really good listener. (Active Listening.)

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## The Art of Effective Communication

“If you can’t communicate, you can’t manage.”

### *Worth Remembering...*

*“One of the indispensable functions of informal organizations — is that of communication.”*

— Chester Barnard (1886-1961)

Ken Blanchard in his book, *The One Minute Manager*, said this about the importance of communication: “*Communication is the breakfast of champions*”. I can’t think of a more valuable skill for managers to have than the ability to communicate effectively up, down, and across the organization.

The power of the spoken and unspoken word can’t be overlooked. The words you choose and how you go about saying them can be the catalyst for action or in-action. You can build people up or tear them down simply by the tone of your voice and the non-verbal messages your body language sends. In Barack Obama’s case his ability to communicate effectively inspired a Nation — and changed our World forever.

I became a CNN junky during the Democratic Parties primary contest watching Barack and Hillary battle each other for the nomination to represent their party and then the historical USA Presidential race. (Who was the more effective communicator — John McCain or Barack Obama?)

Of the ten chapters in this book I consider this one to be the most important. I’m sure most authors will tell you that every chapter in their book is worth reading — and I shouldn’t be the exception — however, if you want to get the best bang for your buck — spend it here. Always keep in mind that if you can’t communicate in a way that

ensures the other person receives the message the way you intended — then what ever you say will mean absolutely nothing. If you can't communicate effectively — then you can't manage people — period! I can't say it any plainer than that. Communication isn't just something. Communication is absolutely everything! To be a good manager you need to communicate, educate and delegate effectively. If you can't communicate then you stand little chance of being able to educate and delegate well.

The cause of most conflicts can usually be traced back to a breakdown somewhere in the communication process. The root cause for the conflict was either wrong information, missed information, or not enough of the right information getting to all of the stakeholders. How often have you attended a meeting only to find out that the people who needed to be there were not there? How often have you sat in a meeting wondering why you where invited in the first place?

I believe that having the ability to communicate effectively is an art form. It is an acquired skill. Research conducted by Dr. Ralph Nichols suggests that humans aren't built to be good communicators — but we are born with the ability to learn how. Whether you learn or not will depend on whether you believe that having the ability to communicate more effectively with the people you interact with — at work and at home — is important enough for you to want to develop those kinds of habits needed to communicate more effectively.

Take a moment and think about what it would mean to you if you could improve your ability to communicate more effectively. What would it do for the people you work with?

List some of the benefits you would receive if you were able to communicate more effectively:

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***Worth Remembering...***

*“Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.”*

*– Robert Greenleaf (1904-1999)*

How would you define communication? What are you trying to accomplish when communicating with someone else? I define communication as an exchange of thoughts and ideas amongst one or more persons. (Of course I have been known to talk to myself.) The key word here is “exchange”. It suggests to me that communication is two-way. Talking and communicating are two different things. Managers can often fall into the trap of talking too much and not communicating enough.

**The Communication Process**

Take a look at this sequence — referred to as the communication process. Is it any wonder that parts of the original message get dropped off and other parts get added on as the message gets sent from the sender to the receiver?

- The sender of the message needs to think of what they want to say.
- The message itself needs to be coded in a language that the other person will understand (Does your organization have their own “buzz” words?)
- The sender must decide what channel they should use to deliver the message. Should it be person-to-person, fax, email, phone, or text message?

- The receiver of the message needs to decode the message in a language that they understand. And hope that both the sender and receiver are on the same page and are using the same dictionary.

### **The Decoding Process**

- The receiver has to sense or become aware that a message has been sent. (How often have you said something to someone and it went right over their head?)
- The receiver must interpret and understand the meaning and purpose of the message. (Keep in mind that you communicate 93% of the time — non-verbally.)
- Then the receiver must decide whether to respond or act upon the message by performing an action, changing their behaviour or sending a message in response to what the sender sent.

And if that's not tough enough — throw into the mix the four different generations that make up today's workforce and how they communicate differently — and you can begin to understand why it can be so difficult to communicate effectively.

I'll talk more about generational differences throughout this book because I think it is going to have a profound impact on how we manage moving forward. Each generation has a different value system, communicates differently, has different motivators and want different things from their work and their personal lives.

### **Generational Communication Differences**

- **Matures** — born before 1946 prefer to communicate formally through memos, letters or one-on-one communication.
- **Baby Boomers** — born between 1946 and 1964 prefer to communicate in person. Most aren't big on writing letters or mailing cards. (I can't remember the last time I hand wrote a letter or mailed a card.)

- **Generation X** — born between 1965 and 1980 prefer to communicate directly and immediately. They want what they want and they want it right now. (Instant gratification.)
- **Millennials** — also referred to as Nexter's — born after 1980 prefer to communicate electronically via email, voicemail, text message or cell phone. They've been known to text each other while sitting in the same room. (Facebook and Twitter have overtaken traditional email as the number one form of electronic communication.)

I haven't even mentioned yet how males and females communicate differently. Throw that into the equation and it starts to look like mission impossible. It takes a great deal of effort on behalf of both the sender and receiver to make sure the proper message has been sent, received and understood.

Research conducted by Distinguished Professor Julia T. Wood — Professor of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina may explain why misunderstandings between the sexes stem from differing interaction styles.

Professor Wood's research produced the following theories:

- Men and women have different ways of showing support, interests and caring.
- Women tend to see communication as a way to connect and enhance a sense of closeness in a relationship.
- Men see communication more as a way to accomplish objectives.
- Men emphasize independence and are less likely to ask for help in accomplishing an objective. (Instructions? Who reads instructions? We're men — we build things. I don't need to read a set of instructions.)
- Women seek out and welcome relationships more than men. (Great skill to have for building collaborative teams. More about that in Chapter Six.)

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- Men tend to think that relationships will jeopardize their independence.
- Women feel that a relationship is going well as long as they're talking about it.
- Men feel that there is no need to talk about a relationship that is going well because no news is good news. (No wonder I'm divorced.)

A study on gender differences in communication styles conducted by Deborah Frances Tannen — Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington DC — produced the following results:

- Men tend to talk more than women in public but the opposite is true at home.
- Women are more inclined to face each other and make eye contact when talking while men are more likely to look away. (Women pay attention to non-verbal cues — they communicate on a more emotional level.)
- Men tend to jump from topic to topic but women tend to talk at length on one topic at a time.
- When listening women make more noises like “mm-hmm and ah-huh” while men are more likely to listen in silence.
- Women are inclined to express agreement and support, while men are more inclined to debate.

***Worth Remembering...***

*“I know you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.”*

*– Author Unknown*

I love that quote. I'm sure we all have been involved in those kinds of conversations. What gets in the way of communicating effectively?

Education, gender differences, age, culture and pre-conceived bias's are some of those roadblocks to effective communication. What are some of your roadblocks? What gets in the way of you being able to communicate more effectively?

What skills do you believe managers need to be an effective communicator? What would you put on that list: patience, open-mindedness, empathy?

**What new skills will you need to learn? Take a moment and write them down.**

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### **Verbal vs. Non-Verbal Communication**

On a percentage basis how much do you think we communicate by the actual words we say? Based on the work of Dr. Ralph Nichols — We communicate just 7% of the time by the actual words we say — 38% of the time by the tone of our voice and an astounding 55% of the time by our body language alone. (You are speaking volumes and you haven't even said a word.)

I want you to think about that for a moment. We communicate 93% of the time — non-verbally. And most adults believe the non-verbal as more accurate — especially women who are far more intuitive to non-verbal communication cues than men. With men, it's usually black or white. With women, it's more in the grey zone. Women communicate on an emotional level. (Women take "feelings" into account when communicating.)

Women tend to read “between the lines”. That’s why most guys’ get caught in a lie every time. Does this sound familiar? You are late coming home because you stopped into the local watering hole to share a few “Pop’s” with your friends. On the way home you concoct a story to tell your significant other as to why you are late. The problem with that rehearsed speech is that she will most likely ask you a question that you didn’t anticipate and your body language will tip her off that you aren’t being as forthcoming as you should be. NLP — Neuro Linguistic Programming — If you think it, your body will tip the other person off as to what you are really saying. Pay attention to a person’s body language when communicating so you can pick up on those subtle nuances and depict what’s really on their mind.

If you take another look at the decoding process you’ll begin to understand why it’s so difficult to communicate. Receiving messages and then trying to interpret the other persons intent is like walking through an active minefield with a blindfold on. What am I suppose to do with this message? Am I supposed to have an opinion — and express it? Or have an opinion — but don’t express it? Or am I just suppose to listen and remain neutral? (Do you like the way I look in this red dress? I’ve learned over the years that sometimes it’s best to say nothing at all — Which is really difficult for me.)

### **Perception vs. Reality**

Here’s an example of what you (the receiver) think is being said (perception) and what the sender meant (reality). You and your significant other have decided to go out for dinner. You are still wearing the clothes that you put on first thing that morning. What are the chances that she would want you to change out of those clothes into something more presentable? (Here comes the confusing part.) As you approach the front door to leave she looks across the room and says to you, “Is that what you are wearing tonight?”

(Keep in mind that men communicate in black and white — women communicate more in the grey area — which means you must be able to read between the lines and interpret what is really being said.) Most men will take that question literally. To you — what you are wearing is totally acceptable. After all — she never said anything to you about what you were wearing when she saw you earlier in the day. You needed to read between the lines to understand what she was really saying. What she was really saying is that — *there is no way that you are going out with me dressed like that!* That's the difference between perception and reality. The meaning of what is being said is predicated on how the receiver interprets it. We do not communicate in reality only perception. The receiver's perception of the message that the sender sent.

***Worth Remembering...***

*“If the essence of communication is to send the message and have it received as it was intended; then you must keep in mind that you are NOT the most important person in the conversation.”*

– Brian Smith (b.1950-)

Here is an example of sending the right non-verbal message. I love my son to death. My relationship with my son is very important to me and in order to have that relationship I needed to show some interest in the things that he was interested in so that we could carry on a conversation. (Two-way communication is the most important element in building relationships.)

My son was going to College at the time in another city. I travel a great deal on business and happened to be in his neighborhood — so I arranged to meet with him and catch up on things over dinner. While driving him back to his place I got stuck traveling behind a transport truck. Back then my son was into anything that had an engine in it. (Cars, trucks, motorcycles, you name it — if it had an engine in it — he was interested.) One of the many things that I admire about my son is his thirst for knowledge. Once he gets interested in a particular subject he researches the heck out of it. So much so — that if you

were to ask him a question about that subject — he would be able to answer it. If I'm looking to purchase a new piece of equipment all I have to do is ask my son which one he thinks I should buy. I know if he doesn't have the answer — he'll do the research and then make a recommendation. What ever my son recommends — I buy — because I know he's done his homework — weighing the pros and cons of each model — before deciding on which one will suit me best.

So here I am — I'm driving down the highway following a transport truck — when all of a sudden my son strikes up a conversation with me about Cummings Diesel Engines and about how they supply 80% of the diesel engine market. He then goes on to tell me about the compression ratios and other facts that only someone who was passionate about diesel engines would know. I am not my son and I am not interested in all the things that he is interested in — but I love my son to death and my relationship with my son is very important to me — so I wanted to make sure that I looked like I was interested in what he was telling me because I wanted him to know that he was important to me. And although I may not be interested in what he was telling me — I was interested in him. (Your thoughts and actions must be as one for the other person to interpret your actions as being sincere.)

***Worth Remembering...***

*"The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people."*

*– Kenneth Blanchard (b. 1939-)*

How often have you been in a conversation with someone and they are non-verbally telling you that they're not interested in you or what you have to say simply by the messages their body language was sending you? (Looking down at their watch, scooping the room to see if there is someone more interesting to talk to or being easily distracted by people walking past.) If I did not appear to be interested in what my son had to say then I would have sent him the wrong message. I would have been telling him that I wasn't interested in him.

Keep that in mind the next time you are speaking to someone — be it a colleague or a customer or one of your employees. Your body language must be congruent with what you are saying — so that the person will believe what you are saying. You must first appear to be interested in them before they will be interested in you.

### **Tips for Sending the Right Non-Verbal Messages**

- Smile. Make eye contact — face the person you are talking to.
- Relax, put your hands down at your side or hold them at waist height. Don't cross your arms and lay them across your chest. You want to appear open and receptive.
- Don't invade their personal space. Stand back a comfortable distance of some 3 feet. You want to be close enough to carry on a conversation without yelling, but not too close that you make them feel uncomfortable.
- I'm a touchy feely person and like to make physical contact when speaking to someone. (Touch their arm or put my hand on their shoulder.) However, some people don't like to be touched — so be careful. If they touch you first — then it's OK to reciprocate.
- Shaking hands is a show of respect. Make sure your hand is dry — don't offer them a "Wet" noodle. Offer them a flat hand not a cupped hand — with a firm grip — pump three times — and then let go. (The idea here is to make a "connection" not crush the other persons hand or hang on forever so they can't get away.)

### **Tips for Sending the Right Verbal Responses**

**Green Light Responses** let's the sender know that you are listening to what they have to say. Green light responses let's the sender know that you are interested in them and you want them to continue talking to you.

- OK
- Hmm
- I understand
- Uh huh
- Yes
- Nod (Affectionately known as the “Head Bobble”)

**Yellow Light Responses** lets the sender know that you have been listening and that you understood what was being said.

- So if I understood you correctly, you said...
- That's interesting — tell me more about...
- Ask probing questions to let the other person know that you are interested in the subject matter and you want to learn more.

**Red Light Responses** gets you a one word — yes or no answer. It lets you know if you're going in the right direction. Use it to check in and stay connected to the other person. (This response works great when you are looking to close a sale.)

- Based on what you said I recommend this. Is that what you had in mind?
- Am I making myself clear? Do you have any concerns?
- Have I explained it properly? Do you have any other questions?

### **Communication Realities**

- You cannot — not communicate
- Whenever contact is made — communication occurs.

- Meanings are in people not in words. (Watch their body language.)
- All types of communications are received but 70 to 90% are screened out or changed by the receiver.
- We communicate only 7% of the time by the words that we say.
- We communicate 38% of the time by the tone of our voice alone.
- We communicate 55% of the time by our body language.
- You are communicating 93% of the time without even saying a word.

***Worth Remembering...***

*“Communication is best achieved through simple planning and control. Most conversations drift along; in business, this is wasteful; as a manager seek communication rather than chatter.”*

– Gerald M. Butler (b. 1959-)

**Tips for Communicating and Interacting More Effectively**

- When giving instructions use direct, to-the-point communication without a lot of social chatter. (Too much information muddies the water and tends to confuse the brain. Less is more.)
- Check at the end of the discussion to make sure everything was heard. Ask open-ended questions to promote dialogue. (The Five W’s — what, where, when, why and how.)
- Don’t use a closed question if you want to promote dialogue. Closed will only get you a one word response. (Yes or no.)
- Use informal, open-ended discussions in a social environment. It encourages small talk. (Small talk is important for building rapport.)
- Provide an opportunity to share stories and ideas in an enthusiastic exchange. (It lets the other person know that you like them.)

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- Use two-way dialogue, responding to a person's feelings is just as important as what is being said. (Develop empathy.)
- Provide regular opportunities for informal, casual discussions. (This is a great exercise for building collaborative teams.)
- Initiate discussions in a friendly, low-key manner.
- Listen more than you talk. (Don't take over the conversation.)
- Use formal communication in new situations, avoiding personal questions until you have established a relationship. (More about that in Chapter Eight.)
- Use logical, matter-of-fact statements rather than emotional expressions when you are upset about a particular situation. (Facts only — keep your emotions in check. Smile and keep your arms down at your side.)
- Check for points of disagreement or misunderstanding by being more intuitive to the non-verbal signals being sent. Ask closed questions for clarity. Ask open-ended questions to promote dialogue. Make sure your actions and words are as one.

### ***Worth Remembering...***

*We have needed to define ourselves by reclaiming the words that define us. We have used language as weapons. When we open ourselves to what they say and how they say it, our narrow prejudices evaporate and we are nourished and armed."*

– Selma James (b. 1951-)

### **Communication Style Bias**

Communication style bias is a state of mind experienced when we have contact with another person whose communication style is different than our own. (You may not be able to put your finger on it — but

there is something about that person that you just don't like.) We tend to gravitate to people who have the same communication style as our own — because we like our own style. We tend to shun or turn away from people who have a different style. Always keep in mind that different is just different. And different is OK.

### **Communication Styles**

There are four distinct styles of communicators: Emotive, Director, Reflective and Supportive. Which style do you relate to? What is your communication style?

**The Emotive Style:** Emotive style communicator's usually take the initiative and strike up a conversation in social situations. (My ex-wife is great at this.) They encourage a sense of informality and express their emotions outwardly. (Wear their emotions on their sleeves.) Emotive communicators may be stimulating, excitable, persuasive and dynamic.

**The Director Style:** The Director communication style is business like. Serious in attitude and strongly opinionated. Directors like to maintain control and may be aggressive, bold, impatient, intense and determined. They usually speak in short, rapid bursts. (You won't have to guess what they are thinking. This is a typical D Style behaviour.)

**The Reflective Style:** The Reflective communication style typically controls their emotions. They display a sense of orderliness, express measured opinions, and may appear to be aloof. They may seem preoccupied and stuffy. However, they are precise, disciplined and industrious. (They know what they know and they know it very well.)

**The Supportive Style:** The Supportive communicators typically appear to be quiet and reserved. They are very good listeners. They may be passive and relaxed, yet sensitive and patient. They make decisions in a thoughtful and deliberate manner without trying to brow beat you to death.

As you read through the four communication styles explained above did you relate them to the four styles of behaviour that we discussed in Chapter Three? (DISC — Dominant, Interactive/Interpersonal, Steadiness and Conscientious.) If you understand their communication style you can use that understanding to be able to communicate with them more effectively. If you communicate with them in a style that they like — they may be more receptive to what you have to say. (They may not agree with it but at least they will listen to you.)

### **Tips for Communicating Effectively with Each Communication Style**

#### **Communicating with Emotives:** (Interpersonal/interactive)

- Be enthusiastic
- Take time to establish good will
- Back off on facts and details
- Support their opinions and ideas
- Ask questions and listen attentively

#### **Communicating with Directors:** (Dominant)

- Be business like
- Be efficient and to the point
- Be organized
- Use facts and figures (but don't show pie charts or colourful graphs)
- Help them meet their objectives
- Ask specific questions related to the key issues

**Communicating with Reflectives:** (Conscientious)

- Be prompt and organized
- No nonsense, business like approach
- Show proof and documentation
- Be sure you know what you know
- Never pressure them to make a quick decision. They need time to think it through.

**Communicating with Supportives:** (Steadiness)

- Try to build a social relationship
- Listen carefully
- Professional but friendly approach
- Offer personal assurances and support
- Be patient
- Avoid conflict if possible

***Worth Remembering...***

*“Avoid fight or flight, talk through your differences.”*

*– Stephen Covey (b. 1932-)*

You must never lose sight of the fact that you are in the people business. Learn to manage your relationships effectively and the facts and figures will take care of themselves. Think of the people that you work with as family. If you really think about it — you spend more time with them than your significant others.

## Active Listening — It's Tougher Than You Think

“You’ll learn a great deal more by listening.”

### ***Worth Remembering...***

*Two men were walking along a crowded sidewalk in a downtown business area. Suddenly one exclaimed, “Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket.” But the other could not hear. He asked his companion how he could detect the sound of the cricket amidst the din of the people and traffic. The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to listen to the voices of nature, but he did not explain. He simply took a coin out of his pocket and dropped it on the sidewalk, where upon a dozen people began to look about them. “We hear,” he said, “What we listen for.”*

– Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990)

**A**ctive listening; when you read those words out loud what kinds of images conjure up in your mind? Active Listening — What does it suggest to you? What it suggests to me is that you have to be “Actively” engaged when having a conversation with someone to be really listening. (There is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is you heard something — Listening is you understood what you heard.) What it suggests to me is that we have to be “Actively” engaged to be a good listener.

Are we born knowing how to listen? What key traits (skills) do we need to be a good listener? What are some of the roadblocks that we need to overcome to become a good listener? I’ll try to answer those questions in this section. Sometimes that’s easier said than done because like communicating — having the ability to really listen to someone — is an acquired skill. We are not “wired” to be a good listener but we can learn to be. Research conducted by Dr. Ralph Nichols suggests that we communicate 40% of the time by listening. (If you ever want to learn anything about the person you are speaking with — just ask them a question about themselves and sit back and listen. They will tell you everything you ever wanted to know and then some.)

A recent survey revealed that individuals listen about 25% of the time; most people recall only 50% of what they hear, and 70% of all misunderstandings happen because people do not listen to each other. Did you know that grade school aged children listen to their teacher just 25% of the time? By the time young people graduate from high school they are listening to the teacher just 17% of the time. And by the time they graduate college they are listening to the professor just 12% of the time. How much do you think they are listening by the time they start to work for you?

Have you ever observed a conversation going on between two people and know that neither one of them was listening? You could tell by the non-verbal messages they were sending that they were just waiting for the other person to stop and catch their breath so that they could jump in and take over the conversation. (Two monologues don't make a dialogue.)

It's difficult, if not near impossible, to resolve conflict without each party listening — really listening — to the other sides position.

***Worth Remembering...***

*"I listen to understand. Not necessarily to agree."*

*— Dale Carnegie (1888-1955)*

Author Stephen R. Covey in his book, *"The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit — From Effectiveness to Greatness"*, has some great advice for anyone entering into a negotiation. He said you cannot advance your position to the next level until you can state the other persons position word for word. And they in turn cannot advance their position to the next level until they can state your position word for word.

This style of problem solving and negotiating dates back to what early First Nation customs refers to as, "The Talking Stick". According to First Nation traditions the Talking Stick ensured that all members who wanted to speak could speak without interruption while holding

the Talking Stick. The Talking Stick was said to have spiritual qualities that called up the spirit of their Ancestors to guide them in making good decisions. The rules were simple; whoever holds the Talking Stick has within his/her hands the power of words. Once he/she has said all they want to say on that subject they pass the stick to the next person who wants to speak. The Talking Stick is passed around the circle until everyone has had an opportunity to be heard.

As I had said earlier in this section — listening is not easy. It's hard work because so many obstacles can get in the way. "They are boring — what they are talking about is boring — you're pressed for time — you don't care what they want you only care about what you want." Your internal dialogue rambles on and on telling you all kinds of reasons why you shouldn't listen to the other person.

### **Barriers to Listening:**

What are some of your barriers to really listening to what is being said? What gets in the way of you listening?

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We all suffer from natural tune-out. But it's no wonder because we listen and speak at two different rates of speed. The average person has the ability to speak at a rate of 125 to 150 words per minute. Yet, your mind can comprehend and process information at an average rate of 500 words per minute. If you do the math that adds up to a time lapse of some 350 words.

What are you doing to stay in the moment? What do you do to stay focused on the sender and not let your mind wander? We really have to work at staying in the moment. We really have to concentrate to make sure we have heard the message the way it was intended. It seems almost impossible at times to really listen to what is being said. Here are some other reasons why it may be difficult to actively listen:

- **Effort:** Listening — I mean really listening is hard work. It can be physically demanding to concentrate for a long period of time. How long is your attention span? (Mine seems to be getting shorter and shorter.)
- **Information Overload:** You can only take in so much information before your brain starts to shut off. Your brain needs time to process what you've heard. (Take notes so you have something to refer back to later.)
- **Rapid Thought:** Because we listen and speak at two different rates of speed it's almost impossible for us to stay in the moment. (Asking the speaker open-ended and closed questions will help to keep us engaged.)
- **White Noise:** White noise — sometimes referred to as psychological noise. Things like other people talking, text messages, cell phones or a radio/TV playing in the background. (Turn off the cell phone, put down your papers, turn off the radio or TV, and give the sender your undivided attention.)
- **Lack of Training:** With all the barriers and causes for poor listening we need to learn how to actively listen. (You need to develop some good listening habits.)

### ***Worth Remembering...***

*“We have two ears but only one mouth. Some people suggest that's because we should spend twice as much time listening as opposed to talking. Others suggest it's because listening is twice as hard.”*

*— Author Unknown*

We develop our listening style very early on in our childhood. Research shows that people listen with a natural or preferred approach. Think back to Chapter Three and our discussion about DISC Theory. Is there a connection between our DISC style and our listening preferences? Which one of these four listening approaches do you use most often? Which listening “style” do you identify with? What can you take away with you from the information provided below that will help you become a more active listener?

**Appreciative:** People with a preference to appreciate while listening want to enjoy the listening experience. These listeners like to be entertained. They are more likely to pay attention to others if they enjoy the presentation. Appreciative listeners listen for inspiration and prefer listening to speakers who make them feel good about themselves. Appreciative listeners care more about the overall impression of the speaker than the details being presented. (Look confident and be competent.)

**Empathic:** People with a preference to empathize while listening want to provide the speaker with a sounding board to offer support and reflection. Since empathic listeners are patient listeners they tend to listen to the feeling and emotions that are revealed. They care about what has been said and as a result they are often approached by people who want someone to talk to or blow off steam. (Listen — really listen to what the person has to say. Don't offer an opinion until asked.)

**Comprehensive:** People with a preference to comprehend while listening relate what they hear to what they already know by organizing and summarizing what they are hearing. They are good at recognizing key points and links between one message and another. Comprehensive listeners listen to what the speaker is saying, so that they understand the rationale behind the points being raised. They may ask questions to clarify a speaker's position and relate what they hear to their own experiences, in an effort to better understand the message. They can recognize when someone is saying one thing and meaning something else. (Know what you know — don't make it up as you go along.)

**Discerning:** People with a preference to discern while listening want to make sure they get all the information. They frequently take notes on what a speaker says so that they can refer back to their notes later. Discerning listeners want to know what the main message is, so they tend to focus closely on any presentation or conversation. Discerning listeners find distractions very annoying and will do their best to eliminate them. They will likely tune-out if there are too many distractions. (Organize your thoughts. State your purpose and deliver the content. Don't wander off on a side note and get lost talking about things that aren't relevant. Stay on message.)

How can you use your understanding of the four listening approaches; appreciative, empathic, comprehensive, or discerning to send your message in the way that each approach likes to receive them?

Are people going to be more receptive to what you are saying because you took their listening preferences into account?

Remember that it's the role of the sender to send the message in a way that will ensure the receiver receives and understands what is being said. Managers stand a better chance that the receiver will receive and understand it — if they take the receiver's listening preferences into account before they send the message. To discover your personal listening approach I recommend that you score a Personal Listening Profile distributed by Inscape Publishing. (Visit Inscape Publishing at [www.inscapepublishing.com](http://www.inscapepublishing.com) for a list of Distributors near you.)

## **How to Develop Good Listening Habits**

We are adults and we can learn new habits. Stop doing one thing and start doing another and if you do it often enough — twenty-one times in a row — you'll have developed a new habit.

- **Patience:** Be patient with yourself and the speaker. Do NOT interrupt. Concentrate on what the speaker is saying. When they have finished speaking ask questions for clarity. (This was a hard one for me to learn. I have a tendency to jump in and finish your sentence for you.)

- **Focus:** Send verbal and non-verbal cues to the sender that you are giving them your undivided attention. (I call that the Dr. Fraser Crane — Hello — I'm listening.) Be sure to smile — face the speaker — turn off the cell phone, put down your papers, and give the speaker your undivided attention. (I find myself slipping back now and again and positioning my arms across my chest. People may interpret this as being closed and that you are no longer listening.)
- **Open Mindedness:** Don't become emotional. React and respond to what is being said, not to the speaker. As Dale Carnegie said "*I listen to understand not necessarily to agree*". Respect the fact that people have a right to express their opinion. (As long as they do it respectfully and play nice.)

***Worth Remembering...***

*"There is no such thing as a bad listener. There is only a person with inflexible listening habits."*

*— Doug Larson (b. 1926-)*

As I have mentioned already a number of times in this book and I will continue to mention it throughout the rest of this book (remember I have a tendency to repeat those things that I feel are important), learning something new — developing a new habit is not easy. It will be one of the most difficult things you'll ever do. (There is no try — only do or don't.) But if you believe that in order to be a good manager you must learn to be a better listener — then you will put in the time it takes to accomplish that goal. You can learn to be a better listener. (Change the behaviour — change the result.)

Think in terms of how you will benefit by becoming a better listener. What's your WIIFM? What will becoming a better listener do for you? What will becoming a better listener do for your clients and the people you work with?

## Active Listening Skills Worth Developing:

Active listening (Receiving) is as important to communication as effective speaking (Sending). I think the Receiver is the most important person in the conversation. How many times have you told someone that you understood the message only to discover that you didn't really understand what was being said?

How many times have you verbally told someone what you wanted done and although they told you they understood — when you went back to check-in on them — they were doing the complete opposite of what you said?

Active listening is a process in which the listener interacts with the speaker. To really listen requires mental and verbal paraphrasing and attention to non-verbal cues like tones, gestures, and facial expressions. The next time you have an opportunity to listen to someone try to be actively involved by developing/demonstrating these five skills for active listening:

1. **Restating and Summarizing:** You should be able to restate what the speaker said and or summarize the discussion. The speaker should hear their own words being played back to them. (So what you are saying is...)
2. **Paraphrasing:** You are paraphrasing what the speaker said by repeating it as accurately as you can — using your own words. It goes beyond restating and summarizing because you are giving the speaker your interpretation of what the speaker said. (If you met someone in the hallway after the discussion could you tell that person what the discussion was about?)
3. **Non-Words:** Listeners can show the speaker that they are listening by verbally acknowledging the speaker. (Green light responses) Examples of non-words are “ah...huh, yeah, hmmm, oh...” etc. (Remember we communicate 38% of the time by our tone of voice. Try not to sound sarcastic or condescending.)

4. **Supporting Statements:** Another way to verbally acknowledge a speaker is to use supporting statements. Examples of supporting statements are: “Go on; tell me more, and then what happened?; I see what you mean” etc.
5. **Non-Verbal Messages:** Remember we communicate 55% of the time non-verbally. (Body language.)

Your non-verbal messages must be the same as your verbal messages so that the speaker feels that you are being sincere. (Remember people believe the non-verbal messages you send as being more accurate.) Your verbal responses should include non-verbal responses such as: body angle and stance, facial expressions, arms, hands, legs and feet. (Your body language should appear open and receptive. Hands down at your side not across your chest.) You can either help or hinder communication through the non-verbal messages you send as the listener. (Rolling your eyes, yawning, looking around the room, looking down at your watch or tapping the floor with your toe.)

***Worth Remembering...***

*“Listen to everyone in your company and figure out ways to get them talking.”*

*– Sam Walton (1918-1992)*

## Confession Number Five Review:

- Communication isn't just something — Communication is everything!
- We aren't born good communicators but we can learn to be.
- Effective communication is two-way — Sender and Receiver.
- We communicate just 7% of the time by the words that we say.
- We communicate 93% of the time — non-verbally. (38% voice — 55% body.)
- Your thoughts and actions must be as one or the other person will believe the non-verbal (body language) to be more accurate.
- We listen and speak at two different rates of speed.
- We communicate 40% of the time by listening.
- Listen more than you talk — you'll learn a great deal more.
- There are 5 key active listening skills — develop/demonstrate each one and apply them liberally and often.
- Develop good listening habits — Patience, Focus and Open Mindedness.
- If you can't communicate effectively — you can't manage — period!

### ***Worth Remembering...***

*“In the industrial age, the CEO sat on the top of the hierarchy and didn't have to listen to anybody... In the information age; you have to listen to the ideas of people regardless of where they are in the organization.”*

*– John Sculley (b. 1939-)*