

## LEARNING HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

### "Chris" and The Learning Process

Many people have great storehouses of knowledge and skill but are not able to effectively teach what they know to others because they are not acquainted with the typical learner we'll call "Chris." Chris is a composite of all women and men and is a simplified representation of the human learning mechanism. Get acquainted with Chris and how he functions.

Chris learns about the world through the five senses, i.e., seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Of these five, the first two, the eye and ear, represent the most important inputs of information for our purposes.

Information pouring in through the eye and ear flows to the brain and then may come out the mouth in oral form or through the hands as manual expression. Information an individual receives is changed as it enters their mind, and it also changes them. Each Chris will be better or worse by what and how you teach him or her. Chris will never be the same again.

Let's look at Chris' input channels, the ears and eyes. Just because Chris has ears and you told him something doesn't mean he heard, let alone learned it. From babyhood, experience has taught Chris not to listen rather than how to listen. Chris has learned to select the sounds he wants to hear and interpret and cut out or ignore others. He has conditioned himself to become so absorbed in a book that he will not hear a blaring radio, passing traffic or a dog barking.

No wonder Chris can look right at you, listen to you talk, and think about something entirely different. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell by looking his eyes or even his facial expression and know whether Chris is tuned in, turned off, or turned down so low you can't be heard.

Chris' eyes are much more selective about the information coming into them. They look in only one direction at a time and they will focus on a specific spot in that one direction.

Use actual demonstrations with defined objectives. Chris can follow the sequential steps with ease and when audible instruction through the ear supplement and direct the eye, he can store in the brain vivid pictures which can be readily recalled when needed. What has been put in the brain through one of the inlets can be sampled by using the mouth as an outlet to check on how successful the teaching has been. If it comes back mutilated and unrecognizable, nothing has been learned. The tell-back system which is using the mouth as means of learner participation is further imprinting the information upon Chris's mind.

### Managing Your Physical Behavior

Use body language to your advantage when teaching.

### Projecting Ideas

No matter how interesting the subject, nor how well prepared you may be, you are not really managing a teach-learning situation successfully unless your learners learn--that is, they absorb what you are presenting. The learners respond to your voice quality, your "body language," and your attitude, whether it's the way you wanted or not.

Through the skillful use of your voice, your body, and your "presence," you can project your ideas and feelings to the learners in a memorable and pleasant way. In other words, the learning outcomes of your efforts depend, in good part, on your manner and style. Some people just seem to radiate warmth, good humor, confidence, and pleasure at being able to help others learn.

### Maintain Eye Contact

We "reach" each other through our eyes, and a listener feels gratified that the speaker has actually looked at him--but look also at your audience for reactions. The raised eyebrow, the puzzled expression, should warn you to clarify your position or settle any misunderstanding immediately. Sensitivity to audience reception is a real asset to leader-- you can increase your ability just by trying! You would answer a spoken question--try answering the unspoken ones too!

### Use Body Movement Deliberately

The leader who is really trying to use several of the senses of communicate ideas and feeling must use some kind of body language deliberately, lest he use the wrong "language" unthinkingly. Absence of action will suggest three things: you have no feelings or convictions about your subject; you are sick; or you are afraid. On the other hand, stiff and mechanical "elocution" gestures can be laughable. Still, you want to engage your audience visually as well as by the force of your words, and spontaneous, coordinated body action can express your enthusiasm and feeling for your subject.

### Coordinate What You Do with What You Say

You have something to say, you want to say it, your whole being should help you say it. "Suit the action to the word, and the word to the action" would be a good rule--we do not nod our head while saying "no!" nor shake our heads while saying "yes!" (Try it--it's confusing even to the one doing it.) Your gestures ought to arise from a normal, spontaneous desire to clarify or give emphasis. Your gestures should not call attention to themselves, but to your ideas--whatever you want people to learn or to feel.

### Using Your Voice

Your voice has a variety of qualities you can use to enhance your delivery.

#### Pitch

A "good" voice has an interesting range of pitch. Try to start sentences on a pitch high enough to permit you to lower it for contrast, but low enough that you can raise it for contrast, also. Use the

whole range of your voice by thinking--or feeling--what you are saying at that instant--not what you're going to say next.

## Rate

Don't speak so slowly that the learners jump ahead of you or drift away or so rapidly that they're worn out trying to keep up. As with walking, variety is the key to interest-- pauses permit appreciation. Pauses can be used as punctuation marks in speech--they are attention-getters. Don't panic at a few seconds of silence--it can allow ideas to be absorbed, if that's the way you intend it.

## Volume

If possible, check out in advance how much volume you must use to reach the farthest learner--he has the right to hear too. If in doubt, in informal circumstances, ask, especially if he looks quizzical or drowsy. Don't forget that many bodies in a hall tend to absorb some of the noise and you may have to talk louder than you expected. However, most people are not impressed with volume alone, and actors know the value of dropping their voices until the listeners really participate by listening intently. Again, variety...!

## Articulation

You must be instantly intelligible to everyone in your audience. This means work. Laziness is the curse--lazy lips, lazy jaws, and lazy tongues. You may have to overcome a lifetime of habit if you would be a good speaker to an audience of more than a few, where conversational custom permits "eye-balling" reactions and instant demands for clarity. Muffled and indistinct words suggest fuzzy thinking or mental slovenliness to some. Part of what people hear is what you seem to be as you talk.

## Managing Your Attitude

"What you are thunders so loud I cannot hear what you are saying!" (Don't club someone with the truth.) This has real meat for the public speaker. Many listeners will not know you for what you are, of course, but for what you seem to be...or what you seem to feel and think about your topic, at least.

Your attitude toward your role as a leader will creep through what you say. If you are timid or fearful or unprepared, be sure the learners will sense this. Bluster cannot conceal it. On the other hand, mere sincerity may seem merely pitiable unless enthusiasm and energy project it to your listener's consciousness. A positive attitude toward your job of helping people learn will help them learn.