



UK Edition

Making Everything Easier!™

Communication Skills

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Communicate successfully, whatever the situation
- Build trust, engage with empathy and listen carefully to develop relationships
- Express yourself clearly in writing and over the phone, as well as in person
- Manage conflict and effect a positive outcome

Elizabeth Kuhnke

Author of Body Language For Dummies





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Communication Skills For Dummies®

Visit

www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/communication_skillsuk to view this book's cheat sheet.

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by Elizabeth Kuhnke



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Introduction

Make no mistake: your ability to communicate with clarity, courage and commitment is your number one key to success at work and in your personal life. No matter how innovative your ideas, how sincere your feelings or how passionate your beliefs, if you fail to connect with other people and communicate in a way that persuades, inspires or motivates them, your efforts are going to be in vain.

You're never not communicating. Whether you're in a deep sleep, in a heated debate with a colleague or in a text-a-thon with a friend, in today's world of 24/7 communication you're always sending and receiving messages. Some people are outstanding communicators, listening for understanding in addition to conveying their own clear intentions, whereas others struggle to connect with their own message as well as with other people.

Great communication leads to understanding, intimacy and mutual appreciation. The good news is that you can develop and successfully apply communication skills, as long as you're willing to commit to the process and practise. As my father used to say, communication works for those who work at it.

If you want to be recognised as a committed and effective communicator, you need to concentrate and absorb the messages that people convey to you. As well as noticing the spoken words themselves, pay attention to the way the words are delivered. For example, does the speaker's voice rise at the end of a statement, making it sound like a question? Is the voice soft and difficult to hear? Are the spoken words straightforward and direct, or do they convey uncertainty and doubt? How the message is conveyed contains the core of the message.

When you're delivering a message, make sure that your intention is clear and your delivery is congruent with your message. Your aim is to connect with the people you're engaging with in order to achieve mutually satisfying goals and objectives.

About This Book

As an American, married to a German, living in England and working with multicultural teams and individuals around the globe, I'm very aware of the influence of culture – including gender, race and nationality – on communication. Although I devote one chapter specifically to communicating across cultures, my primary focus in this book is on Western communication practices. Writing this book, I've been selective in what I've chosen to include, with my aim being to offer you ways of communicating to enhance your personal and business relationships.

I explain how your attitude impacts on the content and delivery of your message. I describe how treating others with respect and establishing rapport increase your chances of creating clear and compelling communication. I show you how you can develop productive, profitable and positive relationships by listening with an open mind, being certain about the messages you want to convey and being prepared for challenging interactions. When you support the message you convey through words with body language – including gestures, expressions and posture, and voice – you increase your chances of communicating successfully.

Whether you're writing your message, speaking face to face or using the various forms of communication technology, this book encourages you to listen to what others have to say, treat everyone with respect, maintain a clear intention about what

you want to express and convey your message in a way the receiver can understand.

Conventions Used in This Book

Jargon can get in the way of clear communication and so I don't use any in this book. When I introduce a new term, I write it in *italics* and then define what it means. The only other conventions in this book are that web and email addresses are in monofont, and the action part of numbered steps and the key concepts in a list are in **bold**.

What You're Not to Read

The grey-tinted sidebars contain extra text, such as more detailed research information, that's not essential to understanding the section in question. By all means skip these boxes if you prefer, safe in the knowledge that you're not missing out on any essential tips or practical insights.

Foolish Assumptions

Although making assumptions can lead to misunderstandings, I set out mine here for clarity. In this book I assume that you:

- ✓ Are interested in communication skills and want to know a bit about the subject.
- ✓ Want to improve the way you communicate.
- ✓ Are willing to reflect on what you read and put into practice the suggestions I offer.

✓ Expect the best of yourself and others.

How This Book Is Organised

One of the coolest aspects about *For Dummies* books is that you can dip in and out as you please. You don't need to read Chapter 1 to understand what's coming next, and if you want to read the last chapter first, you can do so without ruining your enjoyment and missing out on any info. Whether you start at the end, jump into the middle or begin at the beginning, my hope is that you find what you're looking for. Turn to the table of contents or the index if you're in a rush to find out what you need. Otherwise, sit back, open the book wherever you want and enjoy the read. The following sections give you an idea of what to expect.

Part I: Honing Your Communication Skills

In Chapters 1 and 2, I explore the range of benefits to you of clear and respectful communication and the value of knowing what you want to achieve and how to go about attaining your desired outcomes. Chapter 3 covers some of the different personal communication preferences that you may encounter.

Part II: Being Receptive to Others

The thrust of this part is focusing on the person with whom you're communicating. In Chapters 4 and 5, you discover how building positive relationships and listening actively without

barriers, such as prejudice and judgement, leads to successful communication.

Part III: Putting Your Mind and Body into Your Message

In this part you discover how your physical delivery in combination with your outlook can create clear, effective messages. I describe the impact of your attitude on communication (in Chapter 6) and how your voice (Chapter 7) and body language (Chapter 8) reflect your state of mind, perhaps unknowingly.

Part IV: Managing Communication Challenges

This part offers you insights and techniques for communicating with clarity and confidence whatever the difficulties. I cover navigating your way through awkward situations in Chapter 9 and negotiations in Chapter 10, where one wrong word can create havoc. I lead you through communicating successfully with people from cultures different from your own in Chapter 11.

Part V: Communicating Across Distances

In this part I help you uncover methods of communicating through technologies, ancient and bang up to date. Chapter 12 describes using social media and email, while Chapter 13 involves the slightly less novel form of the telephone! In addition, if you want to communicate in the traditional way with

pen and paper, you find how to compose correspondence that's sure to impress in Chapter 14.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

If you're keen to cut to the core of communication quickly, begin with the two chapters in this part. Chapter 15 contains valuable hints on communicating in person and Chapter 16 is a concise overview of great communication skills.

Icons Used in This Book

For sharpening your thinking and focusing your attention, I use the following icons in the pages' margins:



This icon highlights relevant stories about family members, friends, clients, colleagues or just people I've observed. I hope they entertain and enlighten you about the joys and sorrows inherent in communication.



Here's a chance for you to view communication from a business perspective. By putting communication into a business context I help you see where you can keep doing what you're doing or perhaps make a few helpful changes.



This symbol underscores a valuable point to keep in mind.



This icon indicates practical and immediate remedies for honing your communication skills.



Here you can have a go at putting theory into practice. I've designed these exercises to enhance your skills and turn you into a first-rate communicator.



Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, but if you take note of the common errors that I place beside this icon you can steer clear of the worst. Other people have made these mistakes so that you don't need to!

Where to Go from Here

Each chapter of this book addresses a specific aspect of communication, from improving your listening skills to communicating efficiently through the written word, from appreciating different styles of communicating to establishing how to reach your communication goals.

Although I've designed all the information within these covers to support you in being a top-flight communicator, not everything is going to be pertinent to your specific requirements or interests. So you can read this book in any order that pleases you and in your own time: what, when and where you want.

If you're interested in writing an impressive business-related or personal letter, turn to Chapter 14, and to discover the important impact of your attitude on communication, have a look at Chapter 6. If communicating across cultures concerns you, flip to Chapter 11.

So kick off your shoes, sit back and prepare to pick up a few tips and techniques for becoming the superb communicator you deserve to be. I sincerely hope that you enjoy the journey and benefit from reading this book.

Part I

Honing Your Communication Skills



'I find Blenkinsop's powers of persuasive communication slightly worrying.'

In this part...

This part sets you on the path to becoming an accomplished communicator. Here you can find out the essentials for connecting with your listener and building robust relationships. I show you how to present your case with clarity and conviction, and how to speak successfully with anyone at any time.

Chapter 1

Grasping the Finer Points of Great Communication

In This Chapter

- ▶ Communicating with your whole self
 - ▶ Seeking clarity at all times
 - ▶ Treating other people with respect
 - ▶ Dealing with awkward situations
-

You're always communicating. Whether you're dozing by the hearth on a chilly autumn night, praising your children for their successes at school or admonishing an employee for showing up late for work – again – you're continuously sending out messages through your words, voice and body.

Sometimes your communications are crystal clear, such as when your eyes are sparkling, your mouth is in a full-blown smile and you're holding your arms out wide ready to embrace a returning loved one. But at other times you can convey an unintended message, such as appearing sad, angry or despondent when in fact you're simply considering how to respond to a challenging situation. As a result, taking a level of control about how and what you communicate is vitally important in your personal and business lives.

In this chapter you discover the fundamental points for communicating like a pro, which involves using more than just your mouth and the words you say. I guide you through preparing yourself mentally for conveying your messages clearly and connecting with others who have different points of

view from yours. You also have a quick glance into the value of treating other people with respect and taking the time to listen to what someone else has to say before coming in with your opinion. In addition, I provide a series of steps for handling difficult situations.

Using Your Whole Body to Communicate

Great communicators aim to understand others before making themselves understood. They grasp not only what people are saying through their spoken words, but also recognise what others (and themselves) convey through body language, emotional responses and vocal quality.

If you take one message from this book (and I hope you find many, many more!), remember that conveying information involves all aspects of your personality, your mind, your eyes and ears as well as your mouth and facial expressions, and how you stand, gesture and move your entire body.

Getting into the right frame of mind

By getting into the right frame of mind I mean ensuring that you have a good attitude, and so let go of negative thoughts and beliefs that serve as barriers to accomplished communication. Ditch judgement and blame and think about how you want the conversation to proceed. (In Chapter 6 you find suggestions for checking your attitude.)

Negative thoughts and beliefs that may hamper communication include:

- ✓ Finding fault with the other person
- ✓ Disparaging other people's ideas
- ✓ Belittling individuals' beliefs
- ✓ Ridiculing someone else's point of view



Knowing what you want to achieve and being open to hearing what the other person has to say are the foundations for great communication. If the old saying 'energy follows thought' is true, whatever you focus on achieving in a conversation is what you can achieve.

When you approach communication free of murky thoughts, you can let your linguistic wizardry steer you towards free and open relationships.



Entering a dialogue with an optimistic focus heightens your chances of communicating successfully.

Putting your eyes and ears to work

The best communicators have a keen sense of observation, paying attention to what they see and hear, keeping their perception antennae tuned and registering what they observe. They gauge accurately their surroundings and people's behaviour, noting the mundane, the extraordinary and points in between.