

The Two Sets of *Contradictory* Communication Rules: Maintaining Positive Performance

If you are *sending* a message:

Behavior has **consequences**. You do your best to present information in such a way as to make it as easy as possible for the other person to say “yes”. The response is the measure of the success of your message. You take responsibility for the details of your behavior and the responses of others (within reason).

What is difficult about being responsible for the details of your own behavior and it impacts others?

If you are *receiving* a message:

You make **choices** as to how you interpret behavior and respond to another person. You can choose to give other people the benefit of the doubt and assume their intentions are positive or, at the very least, seem to them as beneficial. You *describe behavior* with neutral words, because you know you cannot read another person’s mind. *Describing behavior* reduces your own emotionality and gives you greater influence over other people’s behavior.

What is difficult about choosing your response to other people’s behaviors and describing their behaviors’ neutrally?

Nonverbal Effective Communication

The expression on your face, do you...

Smile with your whole face or just your mouth, or rarely?

Have a smooth or furrowed brow?

Have a face that is expressive (moving), or blank and still?

Look positive: smiling, eyes open, or negative: frowning, squinting?

Look the person in the face and maintain eye contact, if appropriate?

Sitting posture, do you...

Lean slightly forward, sit totally erect, or slouch backward?

Turn with your shoulders towards or away from the other person?

Sit mostly still or shift in your chair continually?

Standing posture, do you...

Lean slightly forward, or totally erect or slouched?

Turn towards or away from the other person?

Stand mostly still or shift your weight and move constantly?

Hand gestures, do you...

Use some hand gestures, never gesture, or always gesture?

Point at the person?

Do you focus on your task, rather than the person in front of you?

Tone of Voice

It is very difficult to read instructions and then know how to listen to your voice and change how you sound. Practice out loud where you can be alone, such as in the car or the shower. Ask a friend for feedback.

Try smiling: It affects the voice positively
Moving your head up or down changes the pitch: high or low
The speed and rhythm at which you speak
The number of times you pause or take a breath
The variety of pitches, speed and sounds you make

Not using vocal variety can sound flat and cold.
Too much variety can distract from your message.
Balance and variety sound warm and interesting.

You convey emotions through your tone of voice. You can play with vocal variety by conveying each of these emotions with a partner. Are you a “warm” or “cold” communicator?

Friendly versus superior
Contemptuous versus sympathetic
Indifferent versus engaged
Frustrated versus calm
Too busy to help versus eager to help
Comfortable versus nervous

Words That Work

Turn a NO, which slams the door shut, into a possibility, which provides information and moves customers closer to solving their own problems.

1. Replace, “Yes, but...” with “Yes, and...”
2. Replace, “I don’t know.” with “Let me find out.”
3. Replace, “I can’t.” with “What I can do is...”
4. Replace, “We can’t do that.” with “What I can do is...”
5. Replace, “We can’t do that.” with “Here is the address and phone number of the organization that has that service, book, web site, copier, computer service or information.”
6. Replace, “You make me feel.” with “I feel...”
7. Replace, “You must...” with “Would you please...”
8. Replace, “I will help you in a minute” with “I will be finished with this customer in ten minutes. Would you like to wait, come back, find help at another desk, or have me call you after a specific length of time?”
9. Replace, “I will try” with the smaller, specific thing you will actually do.
10. Replace, “You are wrong.” with, “This is the information I have, and here is the document I am using as my source of information. Please tell me more about what you know, so I can better understand your perspective on the situation and where you received your information.”
11. Use power words:
 - a. Next: Next time, please tell me first when the computer is down.
 - b. Instead: What journals do you want instead of the ones we ordered?
 - c. Despite: Despite the confusion about the hours, what are you going to do?
 - d. Satisfy: What will satisfy your concerns about the cataloging?
12. Focus on the customer:
 - a. Focus on the customer’s desired outcome (the future), not just your own resources (present) or the customer’s problem (the past).
 - b. Be specific; avoid generalities.
 - c. Say what can be done, instead of what can’t be done.
 - d. Your nonverbal communication - your smile, tone of voice, and posture - will build rapport and thus, better outcomes.
13. Bad news is the best information; learn from miscommunication.

LSSIRT: Communication Skills for Front Line Library Staff

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