Barriers to effective communication

Barriers to Effective Communication

An effective communication barrier is one of the problems faced by many organizations. Many social psychologists opine that there is 50% to 70% loss of meaning while conveying the messages from a sender to a receiver. They estimate there are four basic places where communication could be interpreted wrongly. A few barriers of effective communication in an organization are given below.

Physical Barriers – One of the major barriers of communication in a workplace is the physical barrier. Physical barriers in an organization includes large working areas that are physically separated from others. Other distractions that could cause a physical barrier in an organization are the environment, background noise

Language – Inability to converse in a language that is known by both the sender and receiver is the greatest barrier to effective communication. When a person uses inappropriate words while conversing or writing, it could lead to misunderstanding between the sender and a receiver.

Emotions – Your emotions could be a barrier to communication if you are engrossed in your emotions for some reason. In such cases, you tend to have trouble listening to others or understanding the message conveyed to you. A few of the emotional interferences include hostility, anger, resentfulness and fear.

Lack of Subject Knowledge – If a person who sends a message lacks subject knowledge then he may not be able to convey his message clearly. The

receiver could misunderstand his message, and this could lead to a barrier to effective communication.

Stress – One of the major communication barriers faced by employees in most of the organization is stress. When a person is under immense stress, he may find it difficult to understand the message, leading to communication distortion. At the time of stress, our psychological frame of mind depends on our beliefs, experiences, goals and values. Thus, we fail to realize the essence of communication.

The above-mentioned barriers to effective communication are considered as filters of communications. You can overcome the barriers to communication through effective and active listening.

By Maya Pillai

Many people think that communicating is easy.

It is after all something we've done all our lives.

There is some truth in this simplistic view.

Communicating is straightforward.

What makes it complex, difficult, and frustrating are the barriers we put in the way.

Here are the 7 top barriers.

1. Physical barriers

Physical barriers in the workplace include:

marked out territories, empires and fiefdoms into which strangers are not allowed

closed office doors, barrier screens, separate areas for people of different status

large working areas or working in one unit that is physically separate from others.

Research shows that one of the most important factors in building cohesive teams is proximity. As long as people still have a personal space that they can call their own, nearness to others aids communication because it helps us get to know one another.

2. Perceptual barriers

The problem with communicating with others is that we all see the world differently. If we didn't, we would have no need to communicate: something like extrasensory perception would take its place.

The following anecdote is a reminder of how our thoughts, assumptions and perceptions shape our own realities:

A traveller was walking down a road when he met a man from the next town. " Excuse me," he said. " I am hoping to stay in the next town tonight. Can you tell me what the townspeople are like?"

" Well," said the townsman, " how did you find the people in the last town you visited?"

" Oh, they were an irascible bunch. Kept to themselves. Took me for a fool. Over-charged me for what I got. Gave me very poor service."

" Well, then," said the townsman, " you'll find them pretty much the same here."

3. Emotional barriers

One of the chief barriers to open and free communications is the emotional barrier. It is comprised mainly of fear, mistrust and suspicion. The roots of our emotional mistrust of others lie in our childhood and infancy when we were taught to be careful what we said to others.

" Mind your P's and Q's"; " Don't speak until you're spoken to"; " Children should be seen and not heard". As a result many people hold back from communicating their thoughts and feelings to others.

They feel vulnerable. While some caution may be wise in certain relationships, excessive fear of what others might think of us can stunt our development as effective communicators and our ability to form meaningful relationships.

4. Cultural barriers

When we join a group and wish to remain in it, sooner or later we need to adopt the behaviour patterns of the group. These are the behaviours that the group accept as signs of belonging.

The group rewards such behaviour through acts of recognition, approval and inclusion. In groups which are happy to accept you, and where you are

happy to conform, there is a mutuality of interest and a high level of win-win contact.

Where, however, there are barriers to your membership of a group, a high level of game-playing replaces good communication.

5. Language barriers

Language that describes what we want to say in our terms may present barriers to others who are not familiar with our expressions, buzz-words and jargon. When we couch our communication in such language, it is a way of excluding others. In a global market place the greatest compliment we can pay another person is to talk in their language.

One of the more chilling memories of the Cold War was the threat by the Soviet leader Nikita Khruschev saying to the Americans at the United Nations: " We will bury you!" This was taken to mean a threat of nuclear annihilation.

However, a more accurate reading of Khruschev's words would have been: " We will overtake you!" meaning economic superiority. It was not just the language, but the fear and suspicion that the West had of the Soviet Union that led to the more alarmist and sinister interpretation.

6. Gender barriers

There are 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. In childhood, girls

speak earlier than boys and at the age of three, have a vocabulary twice that of boys.

The reason for this lies in the wiring of a man's and woman's brains. When a man talks, his speech is located in the left side of the brain but in no specific area. When a woman talks, the speech is located in both hemispheres and in two specific locations.

This means that a man talks in a linear, logical and compartmentalised way, features of left-brain thinking; whereas a woman talks more freely mixing logic and emotion, features of both sides of the brain. It also explains why women talk for much longer than men each day.

7 Interpersonal barriers

There are six levels at which people can distance themselves from one another:

Withdrawal is an absence of interpersonal contact. It is both refusal to be in touch and time alone.

Rituals are meaningless, repetitive routines devoid of real contact.

Pastimes fill up time with others in social but superficial activities.

Working activities are those tasks which follow the rules and procedures of contact but no more.

Games are subtle, manipulative interactions which are about winning and losing. They include " rackets" and " stamps".

Closeness is the aim of interpersonal contact where there is a high level of honesty and acceptance of yourself and others.

Working on improving your communications is a broad-brush activity. You have to change your thoughts, your feelings, and your physical connections.

That way, you can break down the barriers that get in your way and start building relationships that really work.

The acronym AIDA is a handy tool for ensuring that your copy, or other writing, grabs attention. The acronym stands for:

Attention (or Attract)

Interest

Desire

Action.

These are the four steps you need to take your audience through if you want them to buy your product or visit your website, or indeed to take on board the messages in your report.

A slightly more sophisticated version of this is AIDCA/AIDEA, which includes an additional step of Conviction/Evidence between Desire and Action. People are so cynical about advertising messages that coherent evidence may be needed if anyone is going to act!

How to Use the Tool:

Use the AIDCA approach when you write a piece of text that has the ultimate objective of getting others to take action. The elements of the acronym are as follows:

1. Attention/Attract

In our media-filled world, you need to be quick and direct to grab people's attention. Use powerful words, or a picture that will catch the reader's eye and make them stop and read what you have to say next.

With most office workers suffering from e-mail overload, action-seeking e-mails need subject lines that will encourage recipients to open them and read the contents. For example, to encourage people to attend a company training session on giving feedback, the email headline, " How effective is YOUR feedback?" is more likely to grab attention than the purely factual one of, " This week's seminar on feedback".

2. Interest

This is one of the most challenging stages: You've got the attention of a chunk of your target audience, but can you engage with them enough so that they'll want to spend their precious time understanding your message in more detail?

Gaining the reader's interest is a deeper process than grabbing their attention. They will give you a little more time to do it, but you must stay focused on their needs. This means helping them to pick out the messages

that are relevant to them quickly. So use bullets and subheadings, and break up the text to make your points stand out.

For more information on understanding your target audience's interests and expectations, and the context of your message, read our article on the Rhetorical Triangle.

3. Desire

The Interest and Desire parts of AIDA go hand-in-hand: As you're building the reader's interest, you also need to help them understand how what you're offering can help them in a real way. The main way of doing this is by appealing to their personal needs and wants..

So, rather than simply saying " Our lunchtime seminar will teach you feedback skills", explain to the audience what's in it for them: " Get what you need from other people, and save time and frustration, by learning how to give them good feedback."

Feature and Benefits (FAB)

A good way of building the reader's desire for your offering is to link features and benefits. Hopefully, the significant features of your offering have been designed to give a specific benefit to members of your target market.

When it comes to the marketing copy, it's important that you don't forget those benefits at this stage. When you describe your offering, don't just give the facts and features, and expect the audience to work out the benefits for themselves: Tell them the benefits clearly to create that interest and desire.

Example: " This laptop case is made of aluminum," describes a feature, and leaves the audience thinking " So what?" Persuade the audience by adding the benefits ". giving a stylish look, that's kinder to your back and shoulders".

You may want to take this further by appealing to people's deeper drives "… giving effortless portability and a sleek appearance and that will be the envy of your friends and co-workers."

4. Conviction

As hardened consumers, we tend to be skeptical about marketing claims. It's no longer enough simply to say that a book is a bestseller, for example, but readers will take notice if you state (accurately, of course!), that the book has been in the New York Times Bestseller List for 10 weeks, for example. So try to use hard data where it's available. When you haven't got the hard data, yet the product offering is sufficiently important, consider generating some data, for example, by commissioning a survey.

5. Action

Finally, be very clear about what action you want your readers to take; for example, " Visit www. mindtools. com now for more information" rather than just leaving people to work out what to do for themselves.

Key points:

AIDA is a copywriting acronym that stands for:

Attract or Attention

Interest

Desire

Action.

Using it will help you ensure that any kind of writing, whose purpose is to get the reader to do something, is as effective as possible. First it must grab the target audience's attention, and engage their interest. Then it must build a desire for the product offering, before setting out how to take the action that the writer wants the audience to take.

Stress Interview

Stress interviews are used to see how the jobseeker handle himself. You may be sarcastic or argumentative, or may keep him waiting. You may also lapse into silence at some point during the questioning, this is used as an attempt to unnerve the jobseeker.

One-On-One Interview

In a one-on-one interview, it has been established that the jobseeker has the skills and education necessary for the position. You want to see if the jobseeker will fit in with the company, and how his/her skills complement the rest of the department. In a one-on-one interview the jobseeker's goal is to establish rapport with the interviewer and to show that his/her qualifications will benefit the company.

Screening Interview

A screening interview is meant to weed out unqualified candidates. Providing facts about the skills is more important than establishing rapport.

Interviewers will work from an outline of points they want to cover, looking for inconsistencies in the jobseeker's resume and challenging his/her qualifications. One type of screening interview is the telephone interview.

Lunch Interview

The same rules apply in lunch interviews as in those held at the office. The setting may be more casual, but it is a business lunch and the jobseeker has to be watched carefully. The jobseeker must use the lunch interview to develop common ground with your interviewer.

Committee Interview

Committee interviews are a common practice. Jobseeker will have to face several members of the company who have a say in whether he/she is hired. In some committee interviews, you can ask the jobseeker to demonstrate his/her problem-solving skills. The committee will outline a situation and ask him/her to formulate a plan that deals with the problem. The interviewers are looking for how the jobseeker apply his/her knowledge and skills to a real-life situation.

Group Interview

A group interview is usually designed to uncover the leadership potential of prospective managers and employees who will be dealing with the public. The front-runner candidates are gathered together in an informal, discussion-type interview. A subject is introduced and the interviewer will start off the discussion. The goal of the group interview is to see how the jobseeker interact with others and how use him/her knowledge and reasoning powers to win others over.

Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are merely screening interviews meant to eliminate poorly qualified candidates so that only a few are left for personal interviews. The jobseeker's mission in this interviewed is to be invited for a personal face-to-face interview.

Informational Interview

Typically this is an interview set up at the jobseeker's request with a Human Resources Manager or a departmental supervisor in the career field he/she is interested in. The purpose of this interview is to help the jobseeker find out more about a particular career, position or company. He/she is seeking information from these people in hopes that they might refer him/her to someone else in their company or to somebody they may know outside their company who could use your skills.

The Informational Interview is a part of the " cold-calling" process whereby jobseekers are generating their own job leads.

Screening Interview

Typically this is the first step a company takes after the resumes have been scrutinized. The purpose of this meeting is to assess the skills and personality traits of the potential candidates. The objective ultimately is to " screen out" those applicants the interviewer feels should not be hired due to lack of skills or bad first impressions. The interviewer must also " screen in" those candidates she/he feels would make a valuable contribution to the company. Your job during this preliminary meeting is to convince this person you are worthy to take the next step.

The General/Structured Interview

Frequently the Screening Interview is combined with the General Interview

due to time constraints many companies have during the hiring process.

Often the jobseeker will meet with the supervisor over the position for which

he/she is applying. During this interview he/she will be discussing the

specifics of the position, the company and industry.