

Communication Skills for Leaders

Delivering a Clear and Consistent Message

Third Edition

Bert Decker

A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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Learning Objectives for

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR LEADERS

The learning objectives for *Communication Skills for Leaders* are listed below. They have been developed to guide the user to the core issues covered in this book.

The objectives of this book are to help the user:

- 1) Understand the importance of interpersonal communication skills to becoming a leader
- 2) Convey believability by ensuring the verbal, vocal, and visual elements of their communications deliver a consistent message
- 3) Replace negative or neutral habits with those that will improve their interpersonal effectiveness
- 4) Develop and practice the nine behavioral skills of effective interpersonal communication
- 5) Master the six skills of leadership

Assessing Progress

A Crisp Series **assessment** is available for this book. The 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter.

To download the assessment and answer key, go to www.courseilt.com and search on the book title.

Assessments should not be used in any employee-selection process.

About the Author

Bert Decker is a nationally recognized communications expert. The company he founded, Decker Communications, Inc., has been recognized for more than 20 years as one of the leading communications training companies.

Decker Communications provides communications consulting and skill building to more than 400 major organizations. The Decker Method™ is recognized as the best in its field for enhancing communication performance.

Bert Decker has also written the groundbreaking book, *You've Got To Be Believed To Be Heard*, and has appeared on the NBC Today show several times as its communications expert, commenting on the U.S. presidential debates.

Communication Skills for Leaders is based on the Decker Method™ and may be used effectively with the popular book *Creating Messages That Motivate* on the Decker Grid™, available through Decker Communications and at www.deckercommunications.com. Decker Communications, Inc. is headquartered at 104 Point Lobos, San Francisco, CA 94121, (415) 752-0700.

Preface

Christine Figari is a trainer who has been with Decker Communications for more than 18 years. She first called me on the telephone when the company was only a couple years old and quite a bit leaner than it is today. “We’re really not hiring new trainers right now,” I said, “but go ahead and send your resume. We’re always looking for good people.”

I was working in my office the next day when my receptionist, Bobbie, brought in Christine’s resume and said, “I told her you wouldn’t be able to talk to her without an appointment, but she insists on seeing you in person.”

I scanned the resume and saw that it was good, but not spectacular. I thought this was a little pushy, but figured I ought to at least be friendly, so I walked down the hall. I found Christine to be much more impressive than her resume.

What really struck me was her certainty—energetic voice and manner, great posture, an authentic smile. She radiated confidence and competence. I learned more of what I needed to know about Chris within the first 30 seconds after we shook hands than from her entire resume.

We ended up talking for half an hour. Two months later, I hired her.

The point of this story is that your personal impact *does* make a difference. Effective communication is critical in work and at play. It is particularly important to your professional effectiveness because of today’s increasingly competitive environment.

Communication Skills for Leaders is an update of my previous edition, *The Art of Communicating*. This new edition explains the communication-leadership connection and includes updated examples to guide you in learning effective communication techniques.

Achieving excellence in interpersonal communications is a complex process made up of nine basic skills, which are presented in this book. You will learn why each is important and will be able to practice the skills through a variety of exercises, assessments, checklists, and self-tests. You will find yourself using your newfound skills dozens of times a day—both in business and your personal life.

Many of the ideas are commonsense. Some are new. Most important, they all work. They have been tested and proven by more than 300,000 business executives, managers, and salespeople who have participated in the Decker Method of Effective Communicating™ training programs.

Communicating is a learnable skill. It takes work, but the results are worth it. With practice you can raise this skill to an art form, and even enjoy the process.

Good luck!



Bert Decker

The Communication-Leadership Connection

When we look for leaders, we look for people we *want* to lead us. And we tend to judge this “want” factor not so much from the information we have about the leaders, or from their credentials, or from race or intellect. No, the overwhelming factor that makes us want to follow certain leaders is their *ability to communicate effectively*—very effectively. These leaders know the art of communicating.

More Art Than Science

Communicating with another person is not a science. There is not a regimented set of precise and exacting procedures. There are specific, sound principles and themes, and thousands of variations on those themes. It is an art to use your skills and capabilities to best advantage within the framework of the principles outlined in this book.

Before Renoir, Monet, and Cezanne became master artists, they first became skilled and expert in basic brush strokes. They learned the principles of painting. Only then were they free to create masterpieces.

This book was designed to give you the “brush strokes” of interpersonal communications so that you, too, can create a masterpiece during your personal communications with others.

Interpersonal Communication in Daily Life

The emphasis in this book is on one-on-one communication in daily situations in which we exert “personal impact” (or lack of it). The principles, techniques, and skills in this book apply equally well to formal presentations or informal ones where people are continually judging our convictions and abilities.

In truth, we are all public speakers. The only “private speaking” that really goes on is in the privacy of our minds where our ideas bounce back and forth like ping-pong balls. This book refers to the “presentations” we give daily, when we present ourselves and our ideas to others.

Examples of where interpersonal communication skills are required include:

➤ **Within an Organization**

Interviews, meetings, coffee breaks, staff meetings, telephoning, performance reviews, company meetings, hallway conversations, working together on a project, job interviews, lunch breaks, project reviews, negotiating a raise.

➤ **With Customers or the Public**

Customer service, selling, telemarketing, reception desk, association meetings and conventions, TV appearances, telephone press interviews, in-person press interviews, telephoning, promoting, negotiating.

➤ **In Personal Life**

Family meetings, church groups, PTA, parties, telephoning, sports events, dinner parties, parent-child discussions, counseling sessions, wedding proposals.

What other situations can you think of that require effective interpersonal communication skills? List them here:

As you can see, interpersonal communications are not confined to any single aspect of our lives. We communicate interpersonally every time we interact with others. The opportunities for interpersonal communications are almost limitless.

How effectively we communicate interpersonally ultimately determines how successful we become.

Developing Interpersonal Communication Skills

Some people seem to be born with a natural energy and confidence. Others must work at it. Consider the story of one shy and introspective college sophomore:

His professor said he would not amount to much unless he projected himself more forcefully. This hurt a lot because the young man came from a family of leaders.

The professor's remark changed the young man's life because he immediately embarked on an energetic self-improvement program. The college sophomore's name was Norman Vincent Peale.

For all of us, the qualities of those who lead and succeed can be learned and strengthened. All it takes is a conscious effort to learn and apply personal communication skills on a consistent basis with the help of some honest feedback.

This is what this book is all about. Let's get started.

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PREVIEW

PREVIEW

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P A R T

1

Keys to Effective Interpersonal Communication

PREVIEW

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The Significance of Believability

“*The ability to express an idea is well nigh as important as the idea itself.*”

– **Bernard Baruch**

Most of us would agree that in business, as in all of life, the success of any presentation depends on the *believability* of the person speaking. Indeed, a person's believability is critical to any interpersonal success. No matter what is said, it is not going to make much difference to the listener unless the speaker is credible and believed. There can be no action where there is not belief and agreement.

This is not news to most people. What *is* news is that this is not normally taught in our schools. Even more important, it is not generally the way we conduct our interpersonal communications in business.

“Selling” Ourselves Through Communication

The most critical of all communication is face-to-face—when we are communicating about our ideas, ourselves, or our products. At the same time, we are also “selling” our ideas, ourselves, and our products. For example:

- The owner of a new business must be able to effectively sell a business plan to obtain financing or credit.
- A supervisor must be able to clearly communicate the goals of the organization to employees.
- A manager must be able to confront an employee who may also be a friend when there is poor performance.
- A parent must be confident enough to speak up at a school board meeting when pushing for a change.
- An executive in a difficult situation must be calm and confident enough to communicate the facts believably.

This book reflects the practical application of the latest research along with extensive observation about what really counts during successful communications. It applies to public speaking as well as to the dozens of informal presentations we give daily. Interpersonal communication skill is the ability to continually build credibility and believability into everything we communicate.

Verbal, Vocal, Visual Cues to Believability

Three elements are communicated each time we speak—verbal, vocal, and visual. The verbal is the message itself—the words the speaker says. The vocal element is the voice—intonation, projection, and resonance of the voice that carries those words. And the visual element is what listeners see—primarily the speaker’s face and body.

UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian, one of the foremost experts in personal communications, conducted a landmark study on the relationships among these three elements. He measured the differences in believability among the verbal, vocal, and visual elements. What his research found was that the degree of consistency among these three elements is what determines believability.

In the spaces provided, write your estimate of how much believability each of these elements conveys when you are speaking (interpersonal communication) to persuade a listener. The percentages should total 100.

Verbal	_____	%
Vocal	_____	%
Visual	_____	%
Total	100	%

Now turn to the next page for the results of Mehrabian’s research.

Consistency = Believability

Professor Mehrabian's communications research, reported in his book *Silent Messages*, was based on what observers believed when an individual's verbal, vocal, and visual elements conveyed messages *inconsistent* with one another. When Mehrabian tested inconsistent messages, he found that the verbal cues were dominant only 7% of the time, the vocal 38% of the time, and the visual cues were the primary carrier of trust and believability, a whopping 55% of the time.

Verbal	7	%
Vocal	38	%
Visual	55	%
Total	100	%

If the message is *consistent*, then all three elements work together. The excitement and enthusiasm of the voice work with the energy and animation of the face and body to reflect the confidence and conviction of what is said. The words, the voice, and the delivery are all of a piece and the message gets through.

But when we are nervous or awkward or under pressure, we tend to block our content and give an inconsistent message. For example, if you look downward, clasp your hands in front of you in an inhibiting fig-leaf position, and speak in a halting and tremulous voice as you say "I am excited to be here"—you are delivering an inconsistent message. The words will not be believed.

Deliver Your Payload

When you are presenting your idea, you want to deliver your message into the heart and mind of every listener. Compare that with a rocket delivery system. There is the payload, or rocket ship, which a large Atlas or Titan booster rocket must launch into orbit. Without a strong, powerful booster rocket, it does not matter how well crafted the payload is because it will never get there.

In communication, your message is the payload. If you are nervous or wooden, your delivery system will go awry and your payload will not be delivered.

Some people in business are like a cannon ready to fire. They are a rocket with no payload. They may have great delivery skills but no verbal content. Others have detailed, brilliant ideas and productive things to say—technical and financial information—but they block the delivery system to get it out there.

A large majority of people in business give inconsistent messages. This inconsistency is probably the biggest barrier to effective interpersonal communications in business.

Making the Emotional Connection

Another barrier to effective interpersonal communication is not reaching listeners' unconscious, *feeling* level. Extensive research has dramatized the importance of making this emotional connection. Indeed, it is a widely accepted principle of marketing and sales that people “buy on emotion and justify with fact.”

Whether what you are “selling” are widgets or yourself and your ideas, whether your listener is one person or one thousand, if you do not connect with your listeners' emotions, you will not connect with them very effectively.

This is because of our two distinct brains—the *first brain* and the *new brain*. The first brain is our emotional brain, which physically, and often unconsciously, directs our thinking brain, or what could be called the new brain.

Understanding the Two Brains

The first brain consists of the emotionally powerful limbic system, which is the emotional center, and the brain stem, which provides immediate instinctual response. The first brain is primitive, primal, and powerful. It operates at the unconscious level.

The largest part of the brain, the cerebrum, consists of a very thin layer of brain cells called the cerebral cortex. All conscious thought, including language and decision-making, takes place within this thin layer of brain cells—the new brain.

All sensory input—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—goes through the first brain first. The visual input from our eyes goes directly to the first brain. Then it gets forwarded to the thinking new brain, which makes sense of it, or interprets it. If the visual pathways are not stimulated very much (no movement, eye contact, gestures, etc.), the information does not get passed on as readily by the first brain to the new brain.

The same happens with the sound of a voice. The audio signals go into the first brain before being transferred to the new brain. If the sound tends to be flat, monotone, or filled with distracting nonwords, the first brain will tend to shut down and filter the information that is passed on.

The first brain is a lookout, a defense mechanism, a channel for communications that provides positive sensory input. The first brain also controls and triggers other emotions, such as distrust, anxiety, and indifference because of what it sees and hears unconsciously. The first brain is your mind's gatekeeper. It is this primitive part of the brain that gives intuitive impressions.

Have you ever met someone you immediately disliked? That is your first brain reacting instinctively to a warning or signal that you might not even be aware of. Have you experienced love at first sight? Again, this is the first brain in action, making a quick, intuitive judgment.

It is the first brain that decides what information to let into the more developed and reasoning new brain. This is why you must make an emotional connection to be heard.

Comparing the First Brain and the New Brain

First Brain	New Brain
Instinctual and primitive	Intellectual and advanced
300 to 500 million years old	3 to 4 million years old
Emotional	Rational
Preconscious/Unconscious	Conscious
Source of instinctive survival responses: hunger, thirst, danger, sex, and parental care	Source of thought, memory, language, creativity, planning, and decision-making
Common to many animals	Uniquely human