

GLOBAL  
EDITION



# COMMUNICATION

## PRINCIPLES FOR A LIFETIME

EIGHTH EDITION

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# **COMMUNICATION**

Principles for a Lifetime

# ETHICS & COMMUNICATION

## Paraphrase Properly

If used with wisdom, paraphrasing can help both you and your partner clarify message accuracy. The most essential guideline is to use your paraphrasing skills *only* if you are able to be open and accepting. If you try to color your paraphrased comments to achieve your own agenda, you aren't being ethical.

Also avoid the overuse of paraphrasing. Too much of it can slow down a conversation and make the other person uncomfortable or irritated. A sensitive communicator tries not to let his or her technique show.

Other guidelines to keep in mind when you ask questions and paraphrase content and feelings are the following:

- Use your own words—don't just repeat exactly what the other person says.
- Don't add to the information presented when paraphrasing.
- Be brief.
- Be specific.
- Be accurate.

situation were reversed. Even if you have not yet experienced the loss of your mother, you can imagine what it would be like to suffer such a loss. Of course, your reaction to life events is unlikely to be exactly like someone else's response. Empathy is not telepathically trying to become your communication partner.<sup>120</sup> But you do attempt to decenter—to consider what someone may be thinking—by putting yourself “in the other person's shoes” and imagining what he or she may be feeling. Considering how others might feel has been called the Platinum Rule—even more valuable than the Golden Rule (“Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”). **The Platinum Rule** invites you to treat others as *they* would like to be treated—not just as *you* would like to be treated.

**Paraphrase Emotions** The bottom line in empathic responding is to make certain that you understand your communication partner's emotional state. You can paraphrase his or her feelings using common lead-in phrases, such as “So you feel . . .,” “So now you feel . . .,” and “Emotionally, you are feeling. . . .” Although active listening may not always solve a person's problem, there is evidence that listening and paraphrasing someone's emotions can provide emotional and social support to those in need of a friendly and supportive ear.<sup>121</sup>

Paraphrasing feelings (as well as content) can be especially useful in situations in which messages could escalate emotions or produce conflict, such as the following:

Before you take an important action

Before you argue or criticize

When your partner has strong feelings

When your partner just wants to talk

When your partner is speaking “in code”—using unclear jargon or abbreviations you don't understand

When your partner wants to understand your feelings and thoughts

When you are talking to yourself (you can question and check your own emotional temperature)

When you encounter new ideas<sup>122</sup>

As a final word on responding with empathy, realize that although we have discussed empathic responses and the active listening process using an orderly, step-by-step textbook approach, in practice the process won't be as neat and tidy. You may have to back up and clarify content, ask more questions, and rethink how you would feel before you summarize how your partner feels.<sup>123</sup> Or you may be able to summarize feelings without asking questions or summarizing the content of the message. Be sure to adapt the skills appropriately, and ethically, to each specific communication situation. The Ethics & Communication box offers more advice for when and how to paraphrase.

## the Platinum Rule

Treating others the way *they* would like to be treated rather than how *you* would like to be treated (the Golden Rule).



**social support**

Sensitive and empathic listening, followed by messages of comfort or confirmation, that lets a person know he or she is understood and valued.

## Respond to Provide Social Support

Responding with empathy is especially important if you are listening to provide social support or encouragement to someone. You provide **social support** to someone when you sensitively and empathically listen to him or her and then offer messages of comfort or confirmation that let the person know that he or she is both understood and valued. Supportive messages are person-centered; responses should be customized to focus on the other person's specific needs.<sup>124</sup> Research has found that if you value listening as a means of showing social support, then it is more likely that you will be comforted by positive, supportive messages.<sup>125</sup> Supportive listening begets supportive responding. Providing social support does *not* mean trying to solve the issue or problem your communication partner has. Instead, it means communicating genuine concern rather than just going through the motions of pretending to listen.<sup>126</sup>

**How to Provide Appropriate Social Support** What's the best way to express your support? Tables 5.1 and 5.2 summarize research-based suggestions that can help you say the right thing and avoid saying the wrong thing when you are providing social support to others. Research suggests that following these guidelines as appropriate to the other person's situation can help you develop empathic and comforting messages that are likely to be appreciated by your listener.<sup>127</sup> The best types of supportive comments tend to be positive, customized, and person-centered.<sup>128</sup> Remember, however, that there are no magic words or phrases that will always ease someone's stress or anxiety.

Don't be discouraged if your initial attempts to use these skills seem awkward and uncomfortable. Learning to use any new set of skills well takes time. The instructions and samples you have seen in this chapter should serve as a guide rather than as hard-and-fast prescriptions to follow every time. Being an empathic listener can be rewarding in both your personal and your professional life.<sup>129</sup> And here's some encouraging news about listening and responding skills: These skills can be improved. People who have received listening training show overall improvement in their ability to listen to others.<sup>130</sup> Reading this chapter, listening to your instructor give you tips on enhancing your skills, and participating in skill-building activities are well worth your time.

**How to Provide an Appropriate Level of Social Support** What level or intensity of social support should you offer? One research study suggests that when we experience

**TABLE 5.1** Suggestions for Providing Social Support

What to Do	What to Say
Clearly express that you want to provide support.	"I would really like to help you."
Appropriately communicate that you have positive feelings for the other person; explicitly tell the other person that you are her or his friend, that you care about her or him, or that you love her or him.	"You mean a lot to me." "I really care about you."
Express your concern about the situation the other person is in right now.	"I'm worried about you right now, because I know you're feeling ____ [stressed, overwhelmed, sad, etc.]."
Indicate that you are available to help, that you have time to support the person.	"I am here for you when you need me."
Let the other person know how much you support him or her.	"I'm completely with you on this." "I'm here for you, and I'll always be here for you because I care about you."
Acknowledge that the other person is in a difficult situation.	"This must be very difficult for you."
Paraphrase what the other person has told you about the issue or problem that is causing stress.	"So you became upset when she told you that she didn't want to see you again."
Consider asking open-ended questions to find out whether the other person wants to talk.	"How are you doing now?"
Use conversational continuers to let the other person know that you are listening and supportive.	"Yes—then what happened?" "Oh, I see." "Uh-huh."
After expressing your compassion, empathy, and concern, just listen.	Say nothing; just establish gentle eye contact and listen.

**TABLE 5.2** What to Avoid When Providing Social Support

What Not to Do	What Not to Say
Don't criticize or negatively evaluate the other person. She or he needs support and validation, not judgmental comments. <sup>131</sup>	"Well, you never were the best judge of people. You should expect this kind of stress if you hang around with him."
Don't tell the other person to stop feeling what he or she is feeling.	"Oh, snap out of it!" "Don't be sad."
Don't immediately offer advice.	"So here's what you should do: Cut off all communication with her."
Don't tell the other person that all will necessarily be well.	"It's going to get better from here." "The worst is over."
Don't tell the other person that she or he really has nothing to worry about.	"Oh, it's no big deal." "Just think happy thoughts."
Don't tell the other person that the problem can be solved easily.	"You can always find another girlfriend."
Don't blame the other person for his or her problems.	"Well, if you didn't always drive so fast, you wouldn't have had the accident."
Don't tell the other person that her or his expression of feelings and emotion is wrong.	"You're just making yourself sick. Stop crying."

sadness, disappointment, or trauma, most of us prefer a "midlevel" intensity of social support. An intense, overly dramatic response or a tepid, mild response may create additional "noise" for the person you are trying to support. When providing social support, consider offering a moderate level of positive, genuine, and authentic supportive communication.<sup>132</sup> Although the women in the study preferred a slightly higher level of comforting than the men, most of the people studied didn't want over-the-top, melodramatic expressions of support. Neither did they like weak or timid expressions of support. When supporting others, a good place to begin is providing a thoughtful, personal, empathic, and yet not-too-dramatic response.

## STUDY GUIDE: *PRINCIPLES FOR A LIFETIME*

CHAPTER

5

### The Importance of Listening and Responding Skills

#### 5.1 Explain the principle of listening and responding thoughtfully to others.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** You spend more time listening than doing any other communication activity. Being a good listener and responding thoughtfully to others will help you enhance the quality of your interpersonal relationships, develop good collaboration skills, and forge a stronger link between speaker and audience.

#### PRINCIPLE TERM:

closeness communication bias

#### PRINCIPLE SKILLS:

1. Identify specific instances from your own experience in which poor listening skills resulted in a significant communication problem. How would using effective listening skills have diminished or eliminated the problem?
2. Keep a listening journal for one day. Keep track of your listening goals and how long you have listened. Review your journal and note when you were an effective listener and when you were less effective.

### How We Listen

#### 5.2 Identify the elements of the listening process.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** Listening is a complex process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to

verbal and nonverbal messages. The five activities of listening are (1) selecting, (2) attending, (3) understanding, (4) remembering, and (5) responding.

#### PRINCIPLE TERMS:

hearing	understand
listening	remember
select	respond
attend	

**PRINCIPLE SKILLS:** Which of the five activities of listening do you do well? Which need to be improved?

## Listening Styles

### 5.3 Describe four listening styles.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** Each person develops a preferred listening style based on his or her personality, the listening situation, and the listening goal. The four listening styles are relational, analytical, critical, and task-oriented. Knowing your preferred listening style can help you adapt your listening approach for maximum listening effectiveness.

#### PRINCIPLE TERMS:

listening style	critical listeners
relational listeners	second guessing
analytical listeners	task-oriented listeners

#### PRINCIPLE SKILLS:

1. What is your usual listening style? Do you have more than one? How do you adapt your style depending upon your listening goal?
2. What listening situations are the most challenging for you? What strategies could you use to help yourself become a more flexible listener?

## Listening Barriers

### 5.4 Identify and describe barriers that keep people from listening well.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** Many people struggle with the skill of listening. Barriers to effective listening include (1) self barriers: self-focus, emotional noise, and criticism; (2) information-processing barriers: processing rate, information overload, receiver apprehension, shifting attention, and cultural differences; and (3) context barriers: time barriers and place barriers.

#### PRINCIPLE TERMS:

emotional noise	anticipatory communication
receiver apprehension	noise

**PRINCIPLE SKILLS:** Identify your primary listening barriers. What are strategies you could use to overcome the most difficult listening barriers you experience?

## Listening Skills

### 5.5 Identify and use strategies that can improve your listening skills.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** To become a better listener, consider three simple steps that may sound easy to do but are challenging to put into practice: stop, look, and listen. To stop means to be mindful of the message and to avoid focusing on your own distracting inner talk. To look is to listen with your eyes—to focus on nonverbal information. To listen involves the skill of capturing the details of a message while also linking those details to a major idea.

#### PRINCIPLE TERMS:

social decentering	meta-message
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#### PRINCIPLE SKILLS:

1. Do you find yourself interrupting or getting interrupted often? What can you do—as a listener or a speaker—to avoid interruptions and deal with them if they happen?
2. Which of the skill steps (stop, look, listen) do you need to improve the most? What are specific strategies that can help you improve your listening skills?

## Responding Skills

### 5.6 Identify and use appropriate responding skills.

**PRINCIPLE POINTS:** To respond thoughtfully means to consider the needs of the other person. Check the accuracy of your listening skills by reflecting on your understanding of what your partner has said. To respond effectively, be descriptive, timely, brief, and useful. Ask appropriate questions and paraphrase message content to check the accuracy of your understanding. To listen with empathy is to be emotionally intelligent, understand your partner's feelings, and paraphrase emotions. When you provide social support, offer messages of comfort and concern so your partner feels understood and valued.

#### PRINCIPLE TERMS:

paraphrasing	social support
the Platinum Rule	

#### PRINCIPLE SKILLS:

1. Do you usually paraphrase when listening to others in everyday life? If so, how do you summarize messages in a helpful and natural-sounding way? If you don't paraphrase much, what kinds of phrases do you think would help you?
2. How would you assess your ability to empathize with others? What are specific strategies you could use to be more empathic?

# ADAPTING TO OTHERS: DIVERSITY AND COMMUNICATION



There are no ordinary people. —C. S. LEWIS

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## → CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Diversity and Communication
- Culture and Communication
- Barriers to Adapting to Others
- Strategies for Adapting to Others
- Study Guide: *Principles for a Lifetime*



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 6.1** Describe how differences of gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, and social class influence communication.
- 6.2** Define *culture*, and compare and contrast cultural contexts and cultural values.
- 6.3** Illustrate four barriers that inhibit communication between individuals.
- 6.4** Describe seven strategies that will help bridge differences between people and help them adapt to differences.

One of life's unprofound principles with profound implications for human communication is this: *We each have different backgrounds and experiences.*<sup>1</sup> Your employers, teachers, religious leaders, best friends, or romantic partners may not share the same ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status as you. And the not-so-startling fact that people *are* different from one another provides the context for discussion of our final Communication Principle for a Lifetime: *Effective communicators appropriately adapt their messages to others.* Figure 6.1 presents our now-familiar model, which includes this final principle of appropriately adapting messages to others.

We introduce this principle last because often people learn how to adapt only after they have learned the other communication principles. The ability to adapt suggests that you already have a sense of who you are and a consciousness of the presence of others—self-awareness and other-awareness, the components of the first principle we presented.<sup>2</sup> Studies in developmental communication further suggest that the ability to appropriately adapt our behavior to others evolves after we have become aware that there is a “me,” after we have learned to use verbal and nonverbal symbols to communicate, and after we have developed an ability to hear and listen to others. We begin to develop all of these skills as infants and refine them throughout our lives. The ability to adapt ethically to others requires maturity and an other-oriented perspective.

The goals of this chapter are to identify human differences that may inhibit communication with others and to suggest adaptive strategies that can improve the quality and effectiveness of our communication with others. To frame our discussion of diversity and communication, we'll note differences in gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and social class, and the implications these differences have for communication. These categories of difference represent a broad range of human diversity including, but not limited to, other factors such as religious views, political affiliations, and disability.

But simply understanding that there are a range of human differences is not enough to improve communication; it is important to learn how to use effective communication skills to first understand and then adapt to those differences. The ability to adapt is a quintessential communication principle that will serve you well for a lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of being able to appropriately adapt your communication to other people does not mean you have to abandon the traditions, preferences, orientations, and cultural elements that make you unique. Nor does it mean you only tell others what they want to hear. It does suggest that appropriately using communication strategies to understand and bridge differences that exist among people can enhance human understanding. So, we'll conclude the chapter by identifying strategies to establish equitable relationships with others by appropriately adapting to our differences.

**FIGURE 6.1** Communication Principles for a Lifetime

