Effective Communication

Richard Lanoix, MD
Director, Emergency Medicine Residency
St. Lukes-Roosevelt Hospital Center, New York

Chief Resident’s Forum
SAEM, San Francisco
May 18-21, 2006
True or False?

The major determinant to success in Emergency Medicine is how smart you are?
Two most important predictors of success:

- Communication Skills
- Ability to Work with Others

Survey conducted by the University of Pittsburg Business School of Recruiters from companies w/ > 50,000 employees
Chief Resident Job Description

- Motivate colleagues to excel
- Mediate between & for residents
- Negotiate conflict resolutions
- Support your colleagues
- Serve as intermediaries bet. faculty & EMR’s
- Serve as role models
- Delegate tasks
Chief Resident Job Description

Common Denominator?

Effective Communication!
"If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power for speech, for by it I would soon regain all the rest”

Daniel Webster
Nonverbal Communication

A "majority" of the meaning we attribute to words comes **NOT** from the words themselves, but from nonverbal factors such as gestures, facial expressions, tone, body language, etc.
Face-to-Face Communication
The Way Your Message Is Conveyed

- Body language (50%)
- Tone of voice (40%)
- Words (10%)
Attitude Is Infectious and Drives Behavior

- Your **attitude** is the first thing people pick up on in **face-to-face communication**.
- Your attitudes can infect the people who see you with the same behavior.
- When operating from attitudes, such as enthusiasm, curiosity, and humility, your **body language** tends to take care of itself and sends out unmistakable signals of openness.
Nonverbal cues can play Five roles:

- **Repetition**: repeat the verbal message
- **Contradiction**: contradict the message conveyed
- **Substitution**: substitute for a verbal message
  - Ex: a person's eyes can often convey a far more vivid message than words and often do
- **Complementing**: add to or complement a message
  - A boss who pats a person on the back in addition to giving praise can increase the impact of the message
- **Accenting**: non-verbal communication may underline a verbal message
Great Leaders use Nonverbal cues to increase their effectiveness by:

- Clearly understanding what is said
  - via visual clues from people's reactions
  - via behavioral/body language clues, which is valuable feedback.
  - by refining their senses to interpret how others are responding to our line or style of communication
The Secrets of Effective Communication
Top 10 Effective Communication Tips

- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
Top 10 Conflict Resolution Tips

- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
Top 10 Leadership Tips

- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
Listening is an underrated skill!

Listening is a leader’s skill!
Levels of Communication

- Facts
- Thoughts/ Beliefs
- Feelings/ Emotions

Often, the speaker & listener “tune-in” to the level each believes is important, which results is “crossed wires”
Conversation in the United States is a competitive exercise in which the first person to draw a breath is declared the listener.  

-Nathan Miller

“Two monologues do not make a dialogue”
Why Emphasize Listening?

• Best way to get people to listen to you!
• Shows you understand their self-interest by focusing on their point of view at the start, before you tell them about yours.
• Demonstrates “what's in it for them”
• That will motivate them to listen to you
Modes of Listening

• Competitive
  – Listener is vested in promoting their own viewpoint
  – Formulating what to say next, rather than listening
  – Looking for breaks to interject/attack
Modes of Listening

- Passive/Attentive
  - Listener sincerely interested in message
  - Actively listening
  - However, does not verify what is heard
Modes of Listening

• Active/ Reflective Listening
  – Listener sincerely interested in message
  – Interested in what the speaker thinks, feels, & wants
  – Verifies message by repeating it to the speaker
  – Confirms understanding before reacting
Being an Active Listener

• First & foremost, STOP TALKING!
  – It’s difficult to listen & speak simultaneously
  – Nature gave you two ears & only one tongue
  – Hint: Listen twice as much as you talk
The thing that most people want to hear in a conversation is their own voice.

- Use this to your advantage by asking opinion type questions. Allow them to elaborate
- Ask open-ended questions. They can make you a hero. Ex: "How do you feel about ....?, What is your thinking on ....?, Do you believe that ....?."
Being an Active Listener

• Put the other person at ease
  – Make eye contact
  – Give them space, time, & “permission” to speak their piece
  – Be observant, flexible, & open to their needs

• N.B.: Agreement is not a requisite!
Being an Active Listener

• Eliminate Distractions (internal & external)
  – Give your full, undivided attention
  – Cell phones/ Beepers/ Phone calls
  – Most important:

    Choosing the Best Time & Location!
Caveat: Resident “really needs” to talk to you about something important during your busy shift

- Avoid this set up for disaster
  - Must we have this conversation now?
  - I cannot talk now, but let’s set up a time to meet when I can give you my undivided attention
  - Briefly tell me about the issue so that I can think about it before we meet
Being an Active Listener

• Pay attention to the Purpose & Words
  – What is the purpose and intent of the speaker?
  – What do you think their goal is in sharing their information?

• Listen for facts and emotions
  – Don't rush to make a comment or give advice
How to become an Active Listener

• Empathize
• Be patient!
• Watch your emotions
• Judge the content, not the messenger or delivery
Being an Active Listener

• Be very slow to disagree, criticize, or argue.

• If you are compelled to speak:
  **Ask questions**
  – Ask speaker to clarify, say more, give an example, or explain further
Being an Active Listener

STOP TALKING!

“Applause is the only appreciated interruption”

Arnold Glasgow
More Tools...

- Effective “Parroting”/ Paraphrase
  - Ensures you heard the message
- How?
  - Repeat the facts
  - Share the thoughts & beliefs you heard
  - Convey underlying feelings/emotions/intents you believe are involved
Caveat

• Refrain from your desire to ask questions during the process in which the speaker is sending the message to you.
  – N.B.: The answer to your question may be in the message!
  – Timing, timing, timing!
More Tools...

- Recount/Reflect what the other says
  - “Do you mean...?”
  - “Are you saying...?”

- Listen for concepts, not facts

- Silence: If given to the sender- they will fill it. People like people who give them silence & listen!
Once you are certain that you understand the message, you can quit active listening & respond with your own message.
But before you do...

- Consider your goals & the goals of the other person
- Is this the right time and place to deliver your message?
- What are the potential consequences of delivering this message?
Finding the Right Balance

Effective Listening is an interactive process

Listening ↔ Hearing ↔ Responding

N.B.: Asking for clarification on a few points is actually part of listening!
Follow-up is Key!

- Email your understanding of the message & its intent
  - Highlight the most important parts
    - Deadlines
    - Project Goals
    - Concerns, etc
  - Request a reply to ensure your interpretation of the message
Clearing Hurdles...

- Be wary of rehearsing what you might want to say before you say it.
- Do not judge the sender & message too early.
Clearing Hurdles…

- Fight the urge to identify with everything the sender says to you
  - Rather, understand how it relates to the sender
- Even if you have the solution, hear the message before conveying it
- Being informed is more important than being right
Clearing Hurdles...

- Do not pretend to listen (Mind-drift)
  - Live in the moment
- Be nice & supportive, but do not placate
- The goal is not to be popular, but rather
  - Hearing the message
  - Acting accordingly
What type of Listener are You?

- Developing these skills requires work
- Take a few minutes/day &:
  - Detail your listening experiences
  - Grade yourself
  - What could you have done better?
Parting Gifts

• The Power of Yes!

• Do not focus on being a pushover
  – Can you afford to grant this 100th request?

• When put on the spot, reiterate the request, confirm its accuracy, pause, the say: “Yes, it should not be a problem, but let me think about it/ discuss it with... & I’ll get back to you by the end of...”
Parting Gifts

• Most of the time, people just need to vent and be heard. As a leader, this is part of your role/duties. Just listen and be empathetic. No one is expecting you to solve all their problems, or even try to.

• Always ask for the other’s problem-solving suggestions before presenting your own.
Parting Gifts

• When put on the spot, promise nothing!
• Reiterate the request, confirm its accuracy, pause, then say: “Yes, it should not be a problem, but let me think about it/ discuss it with… & I’ll get back to you by the end of…”
Parting Gifts

• Don’t take it personally. The buck does not stop with you. Involve your PD/ Co-Chiefs. Leadership is a collaborative process.

• It is not your job to defend the program. Don’t be so defensive!

• Emails: Write it & save it. Later, review it & decide if you really need to send it.
Parting Gifts

- React to the message, not to the person
- When you make a mistake, admit it and do your best to recover from it
- Never attempt to communicate when emotional. Take a 'timeout'
- Be gentle with yourself and others
- Remember: We tend to judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behavior
The 4 steps to defuse an angry/upset person

• Give them time to talk & say whatever is on their mind, & as long as necessary to say it.
  – Assume an active listening posture & let the sender know you are interested in the message
When Finished... Wait

• There is usually one more thing that they want to say & will say if given an opportunity.
• By waiting, you indicate to the individual that you are interested in what they have to say & want to hear the entire story.
Ask Them to Restate it

- Even if you clearly & fully understood it. Reflect back. Paraphrase it back to them.
- This gives them a chance to confirm that you got the message, or to correct your misconception.
Explain/discuss

• But only after defusing the other person’s anger
• If not ready, return to the 1st four steps
Do Not Forget!

As “Chief Resident,” you are still a resident. Your colleagues certainly have not lost site of this!

Don’t take yourself so seriously. Be humble!
Wisdom has two parts:

1) having a lot to say, &
2) not saying it
Take home message: The 51% solution

If you assume that 51% of the responsibility of communications is always yours... you will maximize communications!