

## 2.6: Chapter Introduction

### Introductory Exercises

1. In order to communicate with others, you need to know yourself. Please complete a personal inventory, a simple list of what comes to mind in these five areas:
  1. Your knowledge. What is your favorite subject?
  2. Your skills. What can you do?
  3. Your experience. What has been your experience writing to date?
  4. Your interests. What do you enjoy?
  5. Your relationships. Who is important to you?
2. To be a successful communicator, it is helpful to be conscious of how you view yourself and others. Please consider what groups you belong to, particularly in terms of race, ethnicity or culture. Imagine that you had to communicate your perception of just one of these groups. Please choose five terms from the list below, and indicate the degree that the term describes the group accurately.
  - Term Describes the Group Accurately = 1
  - Strongly Disagree = 2
  - Somewhat Disagree = 3
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree = 4
  - Somewhat Agree = 5
  - Strongly Agree = 6

Independent	Dependent
Hard working	Lazy
Progressive	Traditional
Sophisticated	Simple
Creative	Practical

3. Now consider how you know someone is listening to you. Make a list of the behaviors you observe that indicate they are listening, and understand you. Share and compare the results with classmates.

*Your mind is like a parachute. It works best when it's open. - Anonymous*

*If speaking is silver then listening is gold. - Turkish Proverb*

### Getting Started

Communicating involves the translation of your thoughts and ideas to words. Speaking or writing involves sharing your perspective with others. Listening, therefore, involves making sense of what is shared with us, and can require all of our attention. A Cuban saying captures it best: "Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. In every head is a world." For us to understand each other we have to listen, and make sense of each other's perspectives. In order for us to work effectively as a group or team, we need to listen to each other, not just hear each other or wait for our turn to deliver a monologue, make our point, or convince others that we are right. Each group member brings a valuable perspective, indeed a world, to contribute to the team.

When group members interact, do you find yourself getting lost in your own thoughts. While text messages and other distractions can be powerful, the most distracting voice by far is our own internal monologue. If you silently talk to yourself, the action is a reflection of the communication process, but you play the role of audience. In your own head, you may make sense of your words and their meaning. You may have rehearsed your "lines" or what you want to say, and completing miss the turns and contributions in the conversation. Then, when I hear what you said, what you meant may escape me. I might not "get it" because I don't know you, your references, your perspectives, your word choices, your underlying meaning and motivation for speaking in the first place.

In this chapter we'll discuss perspectives, and how people perceive information, as we learn how communication is an imperfect bridge to understanding each other. It requires our constant attention, maintenance, and effort. Listening is anything but simple or

easy.

Sometimes people mistake hearing for listening. Hearing involves the physiological process of recognizing sounds. Your ears receive and transmit the information to your brain. Once your brain receives the signals, then it starts to make sense to you. This is the listening stage, where you create meaning based on previous experiences and contextual cues to make sense of the sounds.

Knowing your team involves understanding others, and their perspectives, to see if they understand your words, examples, or the frames of reference you use to communicate your experiences, points and conclusions. Ask yourself when was the last time you had a miscommunication with someone. No doubt it was fairly recently, as it is for most people. It's not people's fault that language, both verbal and nonverbal, is an imperfect system. We can, however, take responsibility for the utility and limitations of language to try to gain a better understanding of how we can communicate more effectively. We can choose to actively listen to each other, and ask clarifying questions instead of rushing to judgment or making statement.

As a communicator, consider both the role of the speaker and the group, and not only what and how you want to communicate but what and how your team needs you to communicate with them in order to present an effective message.

Take, for example, the word "love." Yes, we recognize those four little letters all in a row, but what does it really mean? You can use it to describe the feelings and emotions associated with your mother, a partner, or perhaps your dog. Or you might say you love chocolate cake. Does your use of the word in any given context allow the audience to get any closer to what you mean by this word, "love?" The key here is context, which provides clues to how you mean the word, and what its use means to you. The context allows you to close the gap between your meaning of "love" and what the receiver, or group member, has in their range of understanding of the same word. Your experiences are certainly different, but through clues, contexts, and attempts to understand each other's perspectives, we can often communicate more effectively.

Let's first follow the advice given by the character Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "to thine own self be true." This relates to the notion that you need to know yourself, or your perspective, before you can explore ways to know others and communicate more effectively. You will examine how you perceive stimuli, choosing some information over others, organizing the information according to your frame of reference, and interpreting it, deciding what it means to you and whether you should remember it or just ignore it and move on. We can recognize that not everyone tunes into the same music, trends in clothing, or even classes, so experiences or stimuli can have different meanings. Still, we can find common ground and communicate effectively, if we only choose to listen to each other.

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