

SECTION 7.2 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Good communication leads to good relationships. Remember, communication is learned, so continue to practice good communication skills. The skills needed for good communication include listening, speaking, telephone, and writing skills. The more someone practices communication, the better he or she becomes at communicating.

Study Questions

After studying Section 7.2, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What are the personal characteristics that can affect communication?
- What is effective listening?
- What is effective speaking?
- What are business-appropriate telephone skills?
- What is effective writing?

Personal Characteristics That Affect Communication Skills

We communicate in a variety of ways. It's not just about writing or speaking. Personal characteristics, such as body language, eye contact, and credibility, have a major impact on communication between people.

Despite best efforts, conflict and tension can result if people misunderstand each other. If someone says something that is unclear, politely ask him to explain. If you mistakenly offend someone, don't insist that you're right. Apologize and try again. Situations can usually be smoothed over when the people involved say that they are sorry.

In addition to speaking, we also communicate through body language. But the way we walk, stand, or sit is affected by the practices and traditions of our culture.

Whenever communicating with supervisors, coworkers, classmates, or customers whose backgrounds are different, be aware of their reactions. Specifically, look for reactions that might show they have misunderstood something. See Figure 7.3. The following are guidelines to help people accept and understand others from all walks of life:

- Be aware that not everyone has the same behaviors.
- If misinterpreted behavior has offended someone, clarify and apologize. If offended by someone else's communication, let that person know.
- See and treat people as individuals, rather than members of a particular group.

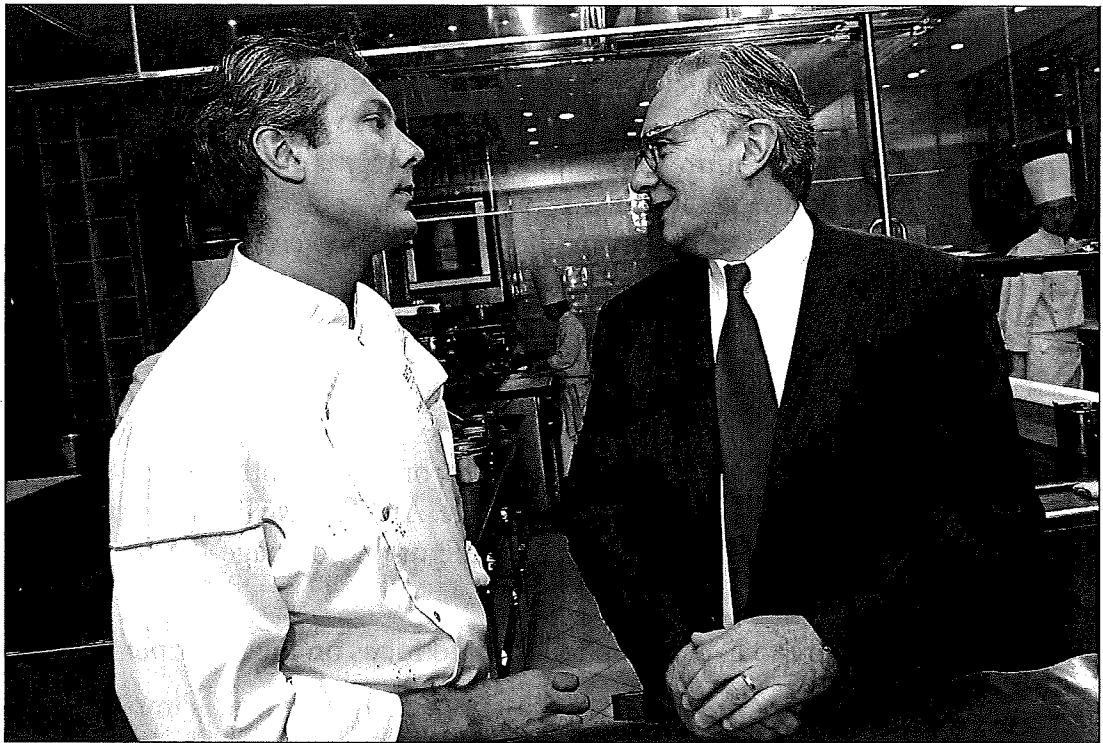


Figure 7.3: Avoiding miscommunication in the workplace results in happier and more productive employees.

In a restaurant or foodservice operation, it is also important that guests find the staff to be credible during communication. Credibility is the ability of a person to be believed. This quality is critical when the communication between two people centers on solving a problem.

For servers, product knowledge is important to credibility. Servers must communicate accurate information to guests. At a minimum, servers should know the menu item descriptions, including specials. Great product knowledge includes preparation techniques, ingredients, allergens, substitutions, and the right combinations of food and drink. With this additional information, a server can present the menu accurately and answer guests' questions. A strong test of credibility occurs when a guest asks about the menu or specific items on it. The guest determines the server's credibility by the knowledge of his or her response. Imagine how a guest feels if a server does not know enough about the menu to answer the guest's question.

When a guest complains about something, the credibility of the server or manager who handles the complaint is critical to good communication. The server must know the operation's policies and procedures for managing complaints, including any allowed adjustments. If the guest senses the server is hesitant, lacks knowledge, or needs to check with someone higher up, the guest may think the server is not credible and may doubt his or her ability to resolve the complaint.

In another situation, chefs must have knowledge of processes and procedures to be credible. The level of knowledge depends on the type of cooking assignment. At a minimum, a chef should be able to describe the correct preparation process or procedure and know how to carry it out. Great cooking knowledge includes knowing the reasons for a process and every step in it, its history or development from earlier methods, and how to compare different, but related, processes.

Effective Listening

Listening is the ability to focus closely on what another person is saying to summarize the true meaning of a message. An effective listener actively participates in the communication process. See Figure 7.4 on page 428. To be an effective listener, follow these guidelines:

1. Prepare to listen. Stop talking and focus on the other person.
2. Show that you're paying attention. Body language is important for showing that you are listening:
 - Maintaining eye contact helps prevent the mind from wandering. In group communications, maintaining eye contact is not always possible, but try to stay focused. For example, in a preshift meeting, some might be tempted to ignore the parts that they think don't pertain to them, but it's important to understand what everyone in the operation is being asked to do (it also helps individuals to understand their roles better).

- Nodding means that the listener approves or recognizes what the person is saying.
 - Leaning toward the person speaking shows that the listener is interested in the content of the message.
 - Facial expressions can help show empathy for the person speaking, meaning that the listener understands the message without placing any judgment on it, or that he can relate to what the person is saying. (I know how you feel; I've felt that way, too.)
3. Don't interrupt and don't finish the other person's sentences in your mind or aloud. Listening to only the first few words of someone's sentence and then assuming they know the rest is a common mistake of poor listeners. Let the other person finish his or her ideas. That way, the reply addresses what the person actually said, not what the listener thought they said.
 4. Ask questions to clarify. It's okay to ask the person to repeat something.
 5. Occasionally rephrase and repeat what you have heard. Check listening skills by saying, "Here's what I think I hear you saying..." and then repeat the main message.
 6. Listen between the lines. Often, it's not what someone says but how the person says it. Learn to read a person's body language. It will yield important clues to his or her true feelings on a subject.
 7. Don't overreact. When someone says something that the listener strongly disagrees with, he shouldn't interrupt, become emotional, or answer rudely. Such reactions send out a strong signal that he's stopped listening and only wants to be heard. Would you listen to someone who doesn't want to listen to you?
 8. Record key ideas and phrases. While most people probably don't need to take notes when talking to friends, note taking is a valuable way to improve listening skills in the classroom or workplace. Notes allow listeners to remember important points that they might otherwise forget. They can also then relay the message to others without losing its original meaning.



Figure 7.4: Effective communication includes good listening skills, making eye contact, and facial expressions.

Practice listening as often as you can. Listening is a learned skill, just like learning a knife skill or a cooking technique.

Effective Speaking

When planning a message, deliver the key points in a brief and clear manner. To ensure that the communication has covered all the vital information, answer the five “W’s” and “how” questions. The five W’s and how questions are the following:

- Who?
- When?
- What?
- Why?

- Where?
- How?

Develop the communication further and think about how the audience will respond to the message. Consider ways to personalize or customize it for them. Make sure the audience recognizes the importance of paying attention to the message. Table 7.2 shows the qualities of an effective speaker.

Interact with the audience.	Create a comfortable interpersonal and physical environment through tone and surroundings. Maintain eye contact.
Use suitable language.	Minimize jargon and buzzwords. Avoid slang. Eliminate sarcasm. Define technical terms.
Use appropriate nonverbal communication.	Use appropriate gestures, including postures that promote confidence. Use appropriate facial expressions. Show an appropriate demeanor (for example, enthusiastically deliver a motivating speech; don't deliver bad news with a smile).
Vary your speech patterns.	Vary the tone and pitch of the voice. Pronounce words clearly as best you can. Use complete sentences that are professional, not casual. Minimize any dialect in speech. Eliminate mumbling or swallowing word endings. Speak at a steady pace. Speak with confidence; be prepared for speaking.
Close the conversation.	Verify understanding. Repeat the message to ensure understanding. Thank listeners for listening. Present opportunities for follow up.

Effective Telephone Skills

A call receiver must be both an effective listener and an effective speaker. Telephone skills are an important tool in the restaurant and foodservice industry. All managers and employees need to know the steps for proper business phone answers. Figure 7.5 shows a manager using effective telephone skills:



Figure 7.5: Effective telephone skills are necessary in a restaurant or foodservice operation.

1. State the name of the organization, followed by the call receiver's name and the question, "How may I assist you?"
2. Listen for the reason the caller has phoned the organization. Be sure to wait until the caller has finished before responding.
3. Maintain a positive, polite, and courteous attitude when speaking with the caller. Empathize with the caller and be enthusiastic. Remember that the person on the other end is hearing the information for the first time. The call receiver has one chance to make a good first impression. Even if you are tired of answering the same questions all day long, you should never let it show. Smile. This may seem like a strange thing to do for a phone conversation, but voices actually sound more pleasant when the speaker smiles. As a result, customers have a positive impression of the business before they even walk through the door.
4. If the caller has a large amount of information, take notes to be sure all the information is received. Be sure to ask the five W's and how questions when taking a message. Don't be afraid to ask the guest to repeat important information. It's better to be sure of the information than to make serious mistakes, such as booking the banquet on the wrong day or ordering the wrong type of wedding cake.

5. Paraphrase or repeat what the caller has stated. Speak loudly enough, but don't shout. Don't talk too fast, and don't slur words. Remember that some people have a difficult time hearing.
6. After listening to what the caller has to say, decide whether you can resolve the caller's problem. If not, know who the "right" person is to answer the caller's issues and transfer the call to provide a quick resolution. Before transferring the call, it is a good practice to get the caller's name and phone number in case the call is lost during the transfer process. This will allow the right person to call the caller back and help him or her resolve the problem.
7. If you can resolve the caller's concerns, explain to the caller any steps to be taken. Know the answers to frequently asked questions. Tape a list of important facts, figures, and phone extensions to the desk or to the phone itself so every employee can provide quick answers. This list simplifies things for other employees and controls the information they give out. But never make a guess. If you don't have the requested information, refer the person to the correct source or offer to find out and call back.
8. Close the conversation either by explaining to the caller that you'll be transferring him or asking whether there is anything else you can do to assist him.
9. Write messages down on a preprinted message form. Clearly note who called and the date and time of the call. Sign your name on the memo in case the person who receives it has any further questions about the message itself.
10. Always end the conversation on a positive note. Thank the person for choosing the restaurant and let him know that you look forward to his or her visit. End the call politely, perhaps by saying, "Thank you for calling (the name of the organization) and have a nice day."

Many restaurant and foodservice establishments have installed special telephone systems that provide useful messages to callers who are put on hold. Often these prerecorded messages inform customers of information they'll need after their call is picked up, such as account numbers or order numbers. Other messages alert callers to an establishment's latest promotion or new business hours. While these message systems help callers stay patient, don't expect customers to hold forever. Thirty seconds on hold seems like an eternity to many people.

When answering the phone, use these guidelines:

- Never put a caller on hold without first asking permission to do so.
- If a caller is on hold, get back to him as quickly as possible.

- If the person whom the caller is trying to reach is still unavailable, ask the caller whether they wish to continue to hold and thank them for being patient.
- If a caller has waited longer than a minute, offer again to take a message.
- If possible, let the person for whom the caller is holding know that there is another call waiting. Try to find out how long the caller will have to hold.

Finally, be careful about side conversations with coworkers while talking to a customer on the phone. Putting a hand over the receiver doesn't completely block out the sound, and callers often hear what's being said in the background.

Effective Writing

Most of a manager's communication with staff, guests, and supervisors is done verbally, either in person or on the phone. However, written business communication is another means for a manager to share information. These types of messages include memos, faxes, emails, letters, and reports.

Written messages tend to have a more formal structure than spoken messages. Here are the common parts of most written messages:

- **Introduction:** This gets the audience's attention, gives the reason for the message, identifies the topics of the message, and establishes the writer's point of view.
- **Body of the message:** This portion presents the content or topics of the message.
- **Conclusion:** Here, the writer summarizes key points, calls for action, and identifies the benefits and value of the message.

To write a successful message, the communicator needs a strong process that helps him or her to plan what to say and builds the message's structure. A good process can also make writing feel less challenging and result in clear, concise messages. Table 7.3 lists the steps necessary to be an effective writer.

Table 7.3: Steps to Effective Writing

1.	Think about the audience. The monthly financial update to the vice president of sales has a different audience than a training manual written for new servers. A memo to the kitchen staff summarizing new sanitation procedures has a different audience than a memo on the same subject sent to management. Some readers need thoroughness and detail. Others just want the bottom line, while some expect the written word to be a personal transaction between two people. The words and the sense these words convey are different in each case. Each piece of writing should be adapted to the particular audience. Write to each in a style they accept and expect.
2.	Think about the purpose and what needs to be accomplished.
3.	Think about the situation and details. Ask the five “W’s” and “how” questions and write their answers. Who? Where? Why? What? When? How?
4.	Record the action desired as a result of the written message.
5.	Identify the benefits to the message. How will it help the company, the reader, the customers, and the communicator?
6.	Identify the topics and group the details underneath it.
7.	Order the topics in a logical sequence.
8.	Write the main body first, then the introduction, and then the conclusion.
9.	Read through the draft and edit and revise the content, grammar, spelling, flow, and readability. Ask someone else, such as a peer, to read the draft and make suggestions for improvement.
10.	Write the final draft and distribute the communication.

While developing written communication, keep in mind these pointers that will make writing easier:

- Be brief. Write like the spoken word, simple and to-the-point. Long, drawn-out sentences are difficult to read. For example, don’t use adverbs when the verb has already described the action. The best written messages get to the point quickly. Avoid stuffy sentences, too. They rarely impress a reader.
- Be clear and complete. Although being brief is important, be sure not to sacrifice clarity or completeness.
- Review writing to be sure ideas are understandable and comprehensive. Make sure to address the five W’s and how questions. The reason for putting a message down on paper is to make it clear to the audience. One sentence should lead logically into the next sentence. It is the responsibility of a business writer to communicate ideas clearly. In most cases, restaurant and foodservice managers write to confirm oral agreements made over the phone with suppliers. In some cases, however, they will have an idea that differs from the ideas of the person to whom they are writing. It then becomes