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COMMUNICATION

S K I L L S

A C T I V I T I E S

KAREN LAWSON, PHD

SKILLBUILDERS

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Prepared for publication by HRDQ
Authorized distributor Dekon Business Solutions
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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the foundation of all human interaction — personal and professional. It also serves as the basis for all human resource development programs. Unfortunately, other than in those programs that deal specifically with communication topics, this fundamental skill is often taken for granted or addressed in a superficial or cursory manner. Regardless of whether communication is addressed directly or indirectly, it demands an interactive approach to underscore its importance and improve participants' skill levels.

The activities in this collection involve the participants directly in the learning process. The activities can be used in any training program that incorporates communication skills. For example, programs such as customer service, sales training, and supervisory skills all involve communication issues.

The activities are designed to address all three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Participants need to acquire knowledge (cognitive) of the communication process and basic principles. They also often need to change attitudes (affective) before they can improve their skills (behavioral).

Eight different communication topics are addressed:

- I. Communication Awareness
- II. Delivering Your Message
- III. Nonverbal Communication
- IV. Communication Conflicts
- V. Active Listening
- VI. Giving and Receiving Feedback
- VII. Written Communication
- VIII. Presentation Skills.

Format

These fifty activities have been “field tested” in many of the author’s training sessions. They vary in length from 10 to 60 minutes, and are arranged by category. Each activity follows the same format:

- *Goals* — The overall purpose of the activity.
- *Applications* — The general communication categories addressed.
- *Approximate Time Required* — Usually stated as a range of time.
- *Group Size* — Also includes information about how the participants will be grouped.
- *Materials* — A detailed list of everything you need to run the activity.
- *Preparation* — Complete set-up instructions.
- *Process* — Step-by-step outline of what to do and say during the activity.
- *Discussion* — Questions for processing what the group has learned.
- *Variations* — Alternative ways to run the activity.

Applications Matrix

Many activities have more than one application. On the next few pages, you will find a useful Applications Matrix, a quick reference tool for finding the activities that are just right for your training session. The activities are listed in order of length of time required — from shortest to longest.

APPLICATIONS MATRIX

<p>Note: Activities are in order by length of time required — from shortest to longest.</p>		APPLICATIONS							
		Communication Awareness	Delivering Your Message	Nonverbal Communication	Communication Conflicts	Active Listening	Giving and Receiving Feedback	Written Communication	Presentation Skills
ACTIVITY	PAGE								
Packaging Is Important 10 minutes	CA-3	■	■						
Paper-Tearing Exercise 10 minutes	DYM-17		■						
It's How You Say It 10 – 15 minutes	DYM-5		■						
Drawing Conclusions 10 – 15 minutes	DYM-21	■	■						
What Do You Mean? 10 – 20 minutes	DYM-13		■						
The Power of Feedback 15 minutes	GRF-1						■		
How Well Do You Listen? 15 – 20 minutes	AL-1					■			
Distinguishing Behaviors 15 – 20 minutes	CC-5	■			■				
Get to Know Your Apple 15 – 20 minutes	CA-1	■						■	

APPLICATIONS MATRIX

<p>Note: Activities are in order by length of time required — from shortest to longest.</p>		APPLICATIONS										
		Communication Awareness	Delivering Your Message	Nonverbal Communication	Communication Conflicts	Active Listening	Giving and Receiving Feedback	Written Communication	Presentation Skills			
ACTIVITY	PAGE											
Dealing with Conflict 20 – 30 minutes	CC-1		■									
Expressing Different Viewpoints 20 – 30 minutes	CC-41		■									
The Art of Asking Questions 20 – 30 minutes	AL-35				■							
Describing Behavior 20 – 30 minutes	GRF-17					■						
Receiving Negative Feedback 20 – 30 minutes	GRF-29						■					
Eliminating Hackneyed Expressions 20 – 30 minutes	WC-7								■			
Assessing Your Presentation Style 20 – 30 minutes	PS-1										■	
Assessing Your Audience 20 – 30 minutes	PS-11										■	
Dealing with Semantics 20 – 30 minutes	PS-33										■	

APPLICATIONS MATRIX

<p>Note: Activities are in order by length of time required — from shortest to longest.</p>		APPLICATIONS									
		Communication Awareness	Delivering Your Message	Nonverbal Communication	Communication Conflicts	Active Listening	Giving and Receiving Feedback	Written Communication	Presentation Skills		
ACTIVITY	PAGE										
Role Models 30 minutes	CA-11	■									
Listening for Key Points 30 minutes	AL-19			■							
Listening Types Card Match 30 minutes	AL-23			■							
Avoiding Killer Phrases 30 – 40 minutes	DYM-9					■					
Writing a Request Proposal 30 – 40 minutes	WC-37								■		
Body Language 30 – 45 minutes	NC-13	■							■		
Feedback Criteria 30 – 45 minutes	GRF-25								■		
Applying Assertive Behavior 30 – 45 minutes	CC-37							■			
Rotating Trio Exchange 30 – 45 minutes	CA-13	■			■						

APPLICATIONS MATRIX

<p><i>Note: Activities are in order by length of time required — from shortest to longest.</i></p>		APPLICATIONS										
		Communication Awareness	Delivering Your Message	Nonverbal Communication	Communication Conflicts	Active Listening	Giving and Receiving Feedback	Written Communication	Presentation Skills			
ACTIVITY	PAGE											
Creating Sentence Variety 30 – 45 minutes	WC-1									■		
Writing Directions 30 – 45 minutes	WC-19									■		
Active Observation 40 – 50 minutes	NC-17			■								
Using “I Statements” 40 – 50 minutes	GRF-21						■			■		
Applying the Feedback Model 40 – 60 minutes	GRF-3									■		
Walk the Talk 45 – 60 minutes	CA-7										■	
Dealing with Difficult People 45 – 60 minutes	CC-23									■		
Poor Listener on Trial 45 – 60 minutes	AL-31										■	
Getting the Audience’s Attention 45 – 60 minutes	PS-25											■

APPLICATIONS MATRIX

<p>Note: Activities are in order by length of time required — from shortest to longest.</p>		APPLICATIONS							
		Communication Awareness	Delivering Your Message	Nonverbal Communication	Communication Conflicts	Active Listening	Giving and Receiving Feedback	Written Communication	Presentation Skills
ACTIVITY	PAGE								
Dealing with Difficult Audience Members 45 – 60 minutes	PS-37							■	
Thinking on Your Feet 45 – 60 minutes	PS-47								■
Rotating Trio Role Play 50 – 60 minutes	AL-11				■		■		
Writing Effective Memos 50 – 60 minutes	WC-13							■	
Writing Customer-Focused Letters 50 – 60 minutes	WC-25								■

About the Author

Karen Lawson, PhD, international consultant, speaker, and author, is president of Lawson Consulting Group, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in organization and management development. She has extensive consulting and workshop experience in the areas of team development, communication, management, and quality service. Clients include a variety of prominent organizations from industry, financial services, health care, pharmaceutical, government, and education. Karen has taught at numerous universities. She is currently on the adjunct faculty of the University of Delaware. Dr. Lawson holds a doctorate in Adult and Organizational Development from Temple University. She earned her MA from the University of Akron and BA from Mount Union College. She is also a graduate of the National School of Banking in Fairfield, Connecticut. She is the author of six books: *Improving On-the-Job Training and Coaching*, *Improving Workplace Performance Through Coaching*, *The Art of Influencing*, *The Trainer's Handbook*, *Train-the Trainer Facilitator's Guide* and *Involving Your Audience: Making It Active*. She is also co-author of *101 Ways to Make Training Active* and has published dozens of articles in professional journals. She has presented at several professional conferences in the United States and Europe.

ASSESSING YOUR SPEECH HABITS

- Goals:** To recognize speech habits that may lead to creating a favorable or unfavorable impression. Also, to identify ways to improve or change speech habits to be more effective in interactions with others.
- Application:** ■ Delivering Your Message
- Approximate Time Required:** 15 – 25 minutes
- Group Size:** Unlimited
- Materials:** ■ *Speech Habits Assessment* (1 per participant)
- Preparation:** Duplicate one copy of the *Speech Habits Assessment* for each participant.
- Process:**
1. Distribute the *Speech Habits Assessment*.
 2. Explain that the way in which we communicate with people is critical to our success both professionally and personally. Note that the way we speak, our manner as we speak, the words we use, and our tone of voice give people a favorable or unfavorable impression. Our communication habits and practices can either make or break a career or a relationship.
 3. Tell them that the Assessment will give them some insight into their personal speech habits and will provide a starting point for improvement.
 4. Allow 8 – 10 minutes to complete the Assessment.
 5. After all participants have completed the Assessment, ask them to work with the person next to them and share the habits or behaviors they need to improve. The partners will serve as coaches and make suggestions on what the person can do to improve. Allow approximately 6 minutes.

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Process (cont.): 6. After they have shared their assessments and received suggestions, reconvene the entire group and ask for several volunteers to share one of their habits for improvement with the rest of the group.

Discussion:

- What did you discover about yourself after completing this assessment?
- What examples do you have in which a particular speech habit has had either a positive or negative impact?
- What are you going to do to improve a particular habit?
- How will you know when you are successful?
- How do you think the improvement will help you in your interactions with others?