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CHAPTER 2

Leadership Skills

In this chapter, you will learn about the following:

- 1 The communication process and the barriers to effective communication
- 2 Communication skills and strategies that help develop positive relationships (e.g., the ability to express ideas and to listen and respond to others)
- 3 The types of conflict and its common causes
- 4 Strategies to minimize and resolve conflict
- 5 Factors affecting the decision-making process
- 6 Techniques to bring about organizational change, such as time management skills





"A good leader takes a little more than his share of blame; a little less than his share of credit."

Arnold H. Glasgow

In Chapter 1, we examined the various theories of leadership, their conflicting results, and several different leadership styles. By now, you should be aware that leadership does not come with an easy set of instructions on how to go about your day-to-day tasks. But research does indicate that certain leadership tasks can be learned and developed. In other words, to be an effective leader, there are certain areas where you will need to display competence.

Any effective leader displays competence and skill in four important areas: communication, conflict management, decision making, and time management. This chapter reviews some of the accepted guidelines so you will be able to develop your skills in each of these four crucial areas. These techniques will greatly enhance your ability to be an effective leader that people will want to work with.

The Communication Process

Because we spend almost 70 percent of our waking hours communicating – speaking, listening, reading, and writing (or typing) – it seems obvious that one of the most serious flaws of a potential leader would be a lack of effective communication.

The term **communication** basically means sending a message to a receiver. This message can be sent in many forms, yet how do you know if the message was received or understood? Ideas can be shared only if the message reaches the receiver; however, the message must be completely understood in order to be effective. The leader who fails to recognize these concepts is certain to have limited effectiveness in his organization or group.

Although perfect communication is an ideal that can never be achieved, a thorough understanding of the communication process, knowledge of the effectiveness of different types of communication, the development of good listening skills, and the use of paraphrasing and feedback are essential for improving overall communication effectiveness.



The Communication Model

Before any type of communication can take place, a **message** with a purpose must be formulated. This message is then passed between the **sender** and the **receiver** as shown in Figure 2.1. The message is converted or encoded to a **symbolic form** (e.g., oral speech, written words) and then passed via a particular medium or **message channel** (pen and paper, e-mail, radio, phone, direct contact or conversation, notes, dance, music, body language, video) to the receiver. The receiver then retranslates or decodes the message from the sender. The final result is transference of meaning from one individual to another. If the communication is “**one-way**,” then the sender can only assume the message was received and understood. If the communication is “**two-way**,” then the receiver can ask questions if necessary, and the sender can offer **feedback** to clarify.



A message can be passed via numerous message channels, including direct conversation, phone, radio, music, or e-mail.

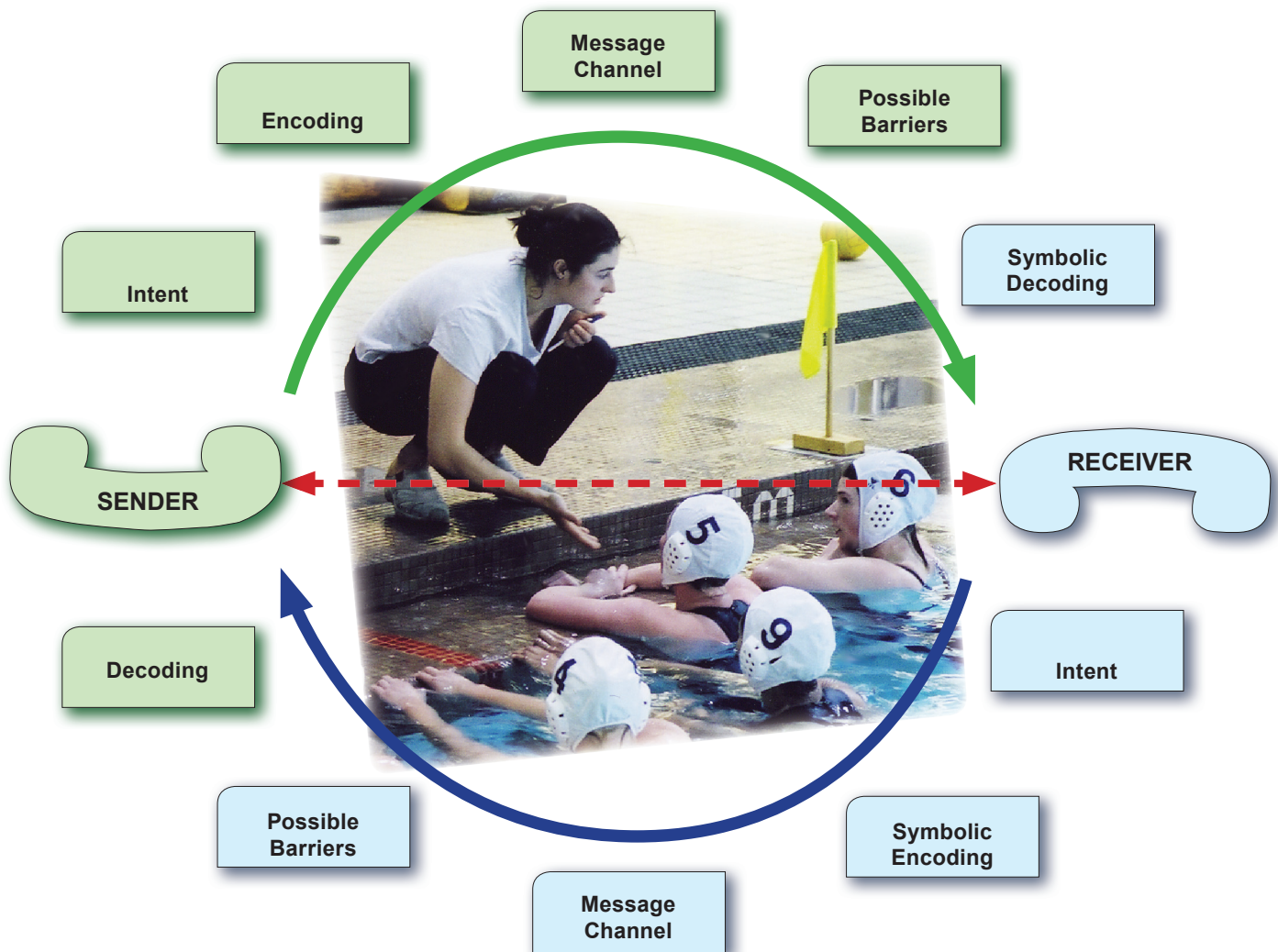


Figure 2.1 The communication model.





Not all communications contain all the components in the communication model, but communication is usually best when it does. For example, one-way communication does not have any feedback, and this can lead to misinterpretations of intent and breakdowns in communication.

Let's take a brief look at the different components of the communication model.

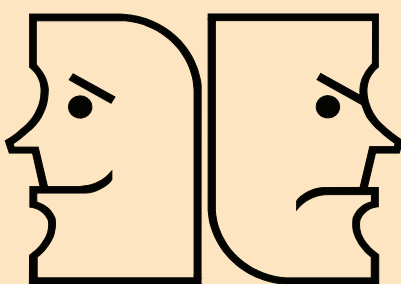
Sender The sender formulates a message by encoding, or putting a particular thought into words (or music, body language, gestures, stance, expressions, pictures, video, and so on).

Message The final product of the encoding is the message. There are many different methods or mediums in which a message can be sent, including words (oral or written), music, and nonverbal or body language. For example, when we speak, speech is the message; when we write, the written words constitute the message; and when we use body language, our gestures, our body position, and our facial expressions all convey a message.

Message channel The medium through which the message is sent is considered the message channel. Examples include television, e-mail, Instagram, phone, radio, bulletin boards, announcements, and flyers.

Receiver The person or population group to whom the message is directed by the sender is referred to as the receiver.

Decoding The message must be understood or interpreted by the receiver. This process is called decoding. If the receiver has any preconceptions about a particular topic, this may change how he perceives a message. Have you ever played the game broken telephone? As you may know, broken telephone involves a number of people passing verbal information from one to another. Each person gets one opportunity to pass the message to the next in line. There are no opportunities for feedback, and because you have to whisper, a natural barrier to communication is present. Invariably, the message gets distorted.



Nonverbal cues such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions convey a lot of information in the messages we send.



Example

Primary message:

The primary message could be that "Johnny got an A on the test and he sat beside Jane, who is the smartest person in the class."

Resulting message:

By the time the message gets to the last person, it might sound as if "Johnny got an A on the test only because he cheated off Jane, who is the smartest person in the class."



Many factors are at work, but people often fill in missing information based on their own personal experiences or beliefs. This is not unlike what happens when office gossip spirals out of control as it is passed on from one person to another. In the end, the truth gets twisted.

Feedback The last step in the communication process is feedback. This stage illustrates to the sender whether or not the intended message was received successfully and decoded correctly. A very popular technique to verify understanding is called **paraphrasing**. The sender asks the receiver to summarize in his own words what he just heard. The sender then determines the accuracy of the response and gives further clarification if necessary. Some communication in the leadership setting does not initially lend itself to feedback, but this step is always important, whenever possible, to ensure full understanding.

Barriers to Effective Communication

When considering the communication process, it is important to realize that there are many potential barriers. A good leader must be able to anticipate these barriers and use strategies to eliminate or minimize their effect on the communication process. In general, the common reason why most groups encounter problems is a breakdown in the communication process within the group. Often, the communication breakdowns are due to communication barriers. Examples of communication barriers include filtering, selective attention, defensiveness, information overload, differing gender styles, poor listening skills, physical or environmental barriers, and body language.

Filtering

When the sender of a message purposely communicates information that she thinks will be viewed favorably by the receiver, it is referred to as **filtering**. The key ingredient in filtering is telling someone what you think he wants to hear. For example, telling your teacher that the class was really interesting and informative, even if you don't really believe that, in the hope that the teacher will raise your mark is an example of filtering. Another example of filtering is when an injured athlete minimizes the seriousness of an injury because she wants her coach to perceive her as being "tough" and committed to team goals.

Selective Attention

Individuals receiving messages invariably see and hear things based on their own needs, experiences, and motivations. This **selective attention** means that we tend to hear and see selectively to reinforce our personal



Comparing One-way and Two-way Communication

One-way Communication

- Message is sent to a receiver
- Message moves in only one direction in the communication model
- No opportunity for feedback or clarification
- Original message may or may not be accurately received or understood
- Examples include posters, e-mail, school announcements, radio and TV ads

Two-way Communication

- Message is sent to a receiver and feedback is returned to the sender
- Message moves in both directions in the communication model
- Opportunity for feedback and clarification
- Original message is more likely to be received and understood
- Examples include phone conversations, Facebook Messenger, chat lines, group discussions



Sometimes athletes try to minimize the seriousness of an injury to maintain their reputation of toughness and commitment to the team.





“Reality is only an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”
Albert Einstein

perspectives, and we base our interpretations on our personal value systems. For example, a man who believes that women are poor drivers will look for situations to support his viewpoint rather than assess all situations equally. Similarly, if you don't particularly like someone, a message from that person will be perceived more negatively than if it had come from another individual. This highlights the old adage that no one truly sees reality – we interpret what we see and call it reality.

Defensiveness

When individuals are feeling threatened, they tend to react in a manner that hinders their ability to understand any form of communication. Rather than listening (or reading) and really trying to comprehend the message, these people often respond aggressively, perhaps by making sarcastic comments, refusing to answer a question by saying “no comment” or changing the subject altogether, verbally attacking others, or questioning the sender's message and motivations. For example, if your coach tells you that you are not putting out enough effort, you may find it tempting to respond that “the drill was stupid in the first place.” This **defensiveness** seriously hinders effective communication and does not solve the problem.

Information Overload

Human beings can process only a limited amount of information. With the increased information processing necessitated by today's ever-increasing number of phone calls, text messages, e-mails, TV programs, and so on, we are faced with **information overload**. An overwhelming array of data is available today. As a result, people invariably resort to weeding out, ignoring, tuning out, forgetting, or passing over information that they normally would have read or thoughtfully considered. Either way, the result is lost information and less effective communication.



Since we are capable of processing a limited amount of information, receiving phone calls, text messages, and e-mails can create an information overload, which can lead to lost information and ineffective communication.

Gender Styles

Current research indicates that men and women use oral communication for very different reasons. This means that gender has the potential to become a serious barrier to effective communication between the sexes. Research suggests that men talk to emphasize status, whereas women talk in an attempt to make a connection. For example, if a man tells you what type of car he drives or what sport he plays, he may hope you are impressed by his choices, but a woman may just be looking for common ground to start up a conversation.

Poor Listening Skills

Many individuals are poor listeners. This is likely because active listening is hard work – it is much more tiring than talking. It is interesting to note



that the average person speaks at the rate of approximately 150 words per minute, but we have the capacity to listen at the rate of more than 1,000 words per minute. It is also generally more satisfying for most people to talk than to listen. So when someone talks, we hear. But how often do we fully listen? Listening involves an active search for meaning, whereas hearing is passive. See the box *Active Listening Skills* later in this chapter on page 37 to learn how to improve your listening skills.



Trying to get the attention of an entire group of students can be difficult if some of them exhibit poor listening skills.

Physical Barriers

There are many examples of physical barriers that prevent, distract, or inhibit effective transfer or interpretation of a message, resulting in a breakdown in communication. For example, the receiver may have a hearing impairment (or the sender a speech impediment), the sun might be in the receiver's eyes (preventing him from seeing the sender clearly), or there might be background noise.

Another common example of a physical distraction is having equipment (such as a ball) readily available to the receiver. This may distract her from listening to the sender's message. For example, if a teen has a basketball in his hand, what is he likely to do with it? Usually, he would want to dribble or shoot the ball. If you are giving instructions in a leadership situation and half the class are dribbling their basketballs, there is a sound barrier and their attention is not focused on you. If the students are all running around the gym, they are even less likely to hear you.



To minimize the barriers to communication in a noisy gym environment, it is a good idea to gather the group in a corner to help keep your voice contained when giving instructions.

