You Are the Message

HoganTaylor

Planning Your Message

Before you start communicating, take a moment to figure out what you want to say, and why. Don't waste your time conveying information that isn't necessary–and don't waste the listener or reader's time either. Too often, people just keep talking or keep writing–because they think by saying more, they'll surely cover all the points. Often, however, all they do is confuse the people they're talking to.

To plan your communication:

Understand your objective and why are you communicating

Understand your audience

Plan what you want to say, and how you'll send the message

Seek feedback on how well your message was received

Good communicators use the KISS ("Keep It Simple and Straightforward") principle. They know that less is often more, and that good communication should be efficient as well as effective.

Creating a Clear, Well-Crafted Message To Your Team

When you know what you want to say, decide exactly how you'll say it. You're responsible for sending a message that's clear and concise. To achieve this, you need to consider not only what you'll say, but also how you think the recipient will perceive it.

We often focus on the message that we want to send, and the way in which we'll send it. But if our message is delivered without considering the other person's perspective, it's likely that part of that message will be lost.

To communicate more effectively:

Understand what you truly need and want to say

Anticipate the other person's reaction to your message

Choose words and body language carefully

With written communication, make sure that what you write will be perceived the way you intend. Words on a page generally have no emotion – they don't "smile" or "frown" at you while you're reading them (unless you're a very talented writer, of course!).

When writing, take time to do the following:

Review your style

Avoid jargon or slang

Check your grammar and punctuation

Check for tone, attitude, nuance, etc.

Another important consideration is to use pictures, charts, and diagrams wherever possible. As the saying goes, "a picture speaks a thousand words."

Also, whether you speak or write your message, consider the cultural context. If there's potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding due to cultural or language barriers, address these issues in advance. Consult with people who are familiar with these, and do your research so that you're aware of problems you may face.

Choosing the Right Channel

Along with encoding the message, you need to choose the best communication channel to use to send it. You want to be efficient, and yet make the most of your communication opportunity.

Using email to send simple directions is practical. However, if you want to delegate a complex task, an email will probably just lead to more questions, so it may be best to arrange a time to speak in person. And if your communication has any negative emotional content, stay well away from email! Make sure that you communicate face to face or by phone, so that you can judge the impact of your words and adjust these appropriately.

When you determine the best way to send a message, consider the following:

Sensitivity and emotional content of the subject

How easy it is to communicate detail

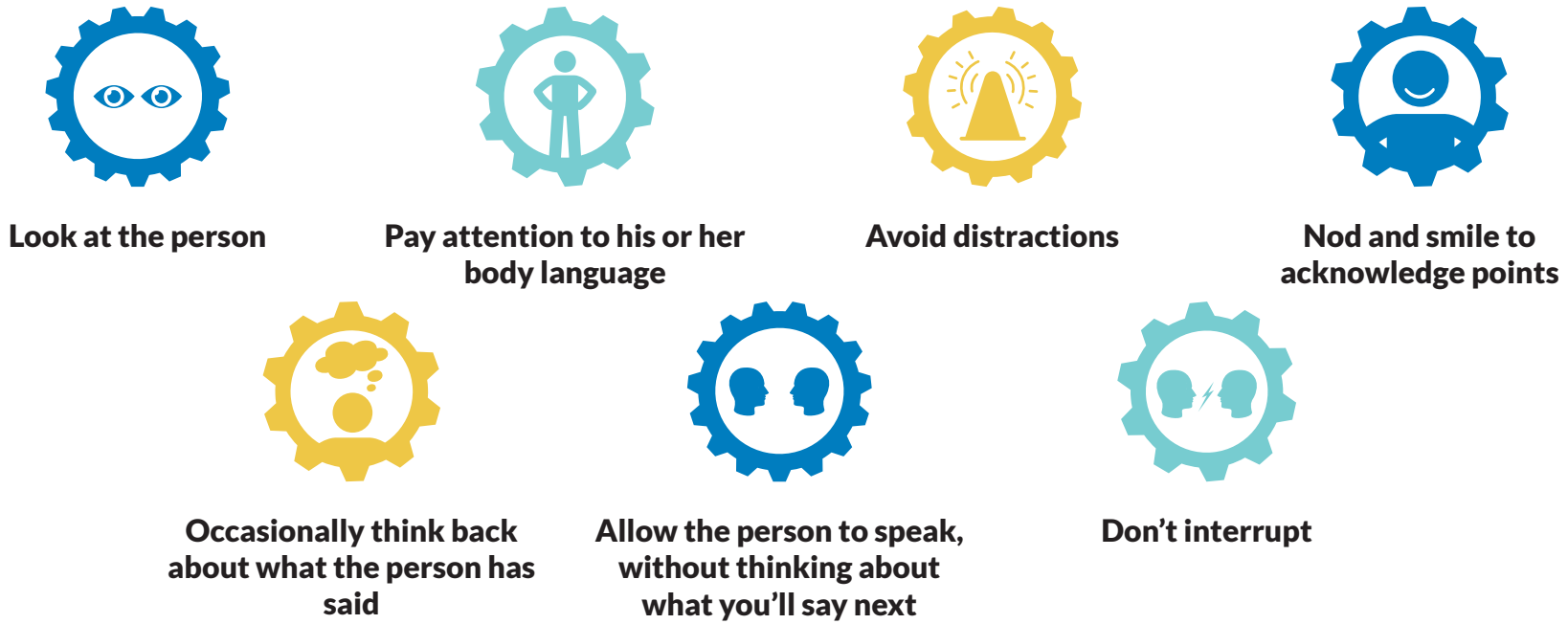**The receiver's preferences**

Time constraints

The need to ask and answer questions

Receiving and Interpreting A Message

It can be easy to focus on speaking; we want to get our points out there, because we usually have lots to say. However, to be a great communicator, you also need to step back, let the other person talk, and just listen.

This doesn't mean that you should be passive. Listening is hard work, which is why effective listening is called active listening.

To listen actively, give your undivided attention to the speaker:

Look at the person

Pay attention to his or her body language

Avoid distractions

Nod and smile to acknowledge points

Occasionally think back about what the person has said

Allow the person to speak, without thinking about what you'll say next
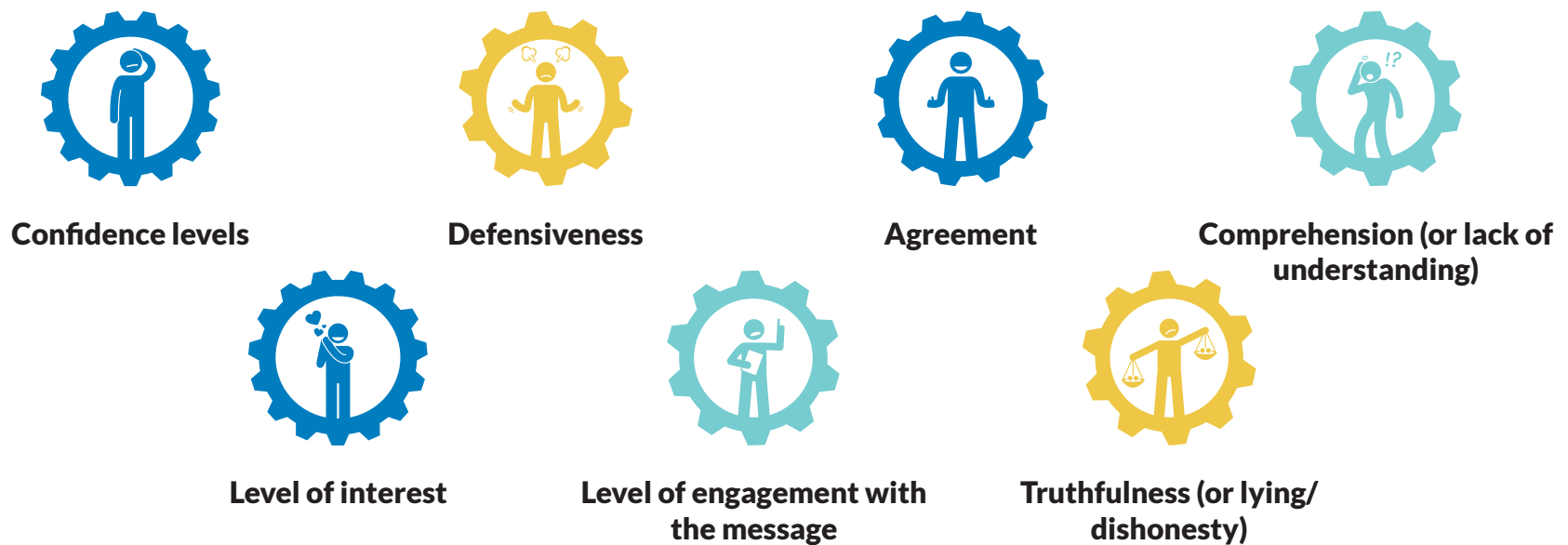
Don't interrupt

Empathic listening also helps you decode a message accurately. To understand a message fully, you have to understand the emotions and underlying feelings the speaker is expressing. This is where an understanding of body language can be useful.

Feedback

You need feedback, because without it, you can't be sure that people have understood your message. Sometimes feedback is verbal, and sometimes it's not. We've looked at the importance of asking questions and listening carefully. However, feedback through body language is perhaps the most important source of clues to the effectiveness of your communication.

By watching the facial expressions, gestures, and posture of the person you're communicating with, you can spot:

Confidence levels

Defensiveness

Agreement

Comprehension (or lack of understanding)

Level of interest

Level of engagement with the message

Truthfulness (or lying/ dishonesty)

As a speaker, understanding your listener's body language can give you an opportunity to adjust your message and make it more understandable, appealing, or interesting. As a listener, body language can show you more about what the other person is saying. You can then ask questions to ensure that you have, indeed, understood each other. In both situations, you can better avoid miscommunication if it happens.

Feedback can also be formal. If you're communicating something really important, it can often be worth asking questions of the person you're talking to make sure that they've understood fully. And if you're receiving this sort of communication, repeat it in your own words to check your understanding.

Source: Mind Tools, a free website offering hundreds of useful career skills

The HoganTaylor Human Capital Strategies Practice

Jeff Wilkie serves as HoganTaylor's Human Capital Strategies Practice Lead. In this role, he works as a confidante and coach to organizational executives and their teams and assists in the focus and formulation of a company's human capital strategy. Providing counsel around talent architecture, he works to identify and build human capital critical to the present operations and future growth of organizations. Jeff also provides consulting services around change management and organizational communications. In his more than 20 years of professional service, Jeff has led many strategic transformational projects to address organizational shifts that influence leadership bench strength, talent alignment and transition management.

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