



Leadership Summer School

16th to 25th July '14 - Istanbul, Turkey

Communication
as the Language of Leadership





Content

Overall Communication models.....

- a. 4 sides of a message
- b. Distortion in communication

Active listening.....

- a. Listen-understand-understand emotionally
- b. Theory U

Feedback.....

- a. Basic feedback rules
- b. Sandwich model
- c. BIO model
- d. Constructive model
- e. 4 levels of feedback

Sending an effective message.....

- a. Minto Pyramid Principle

Framing.....

- a. Appreciative Inquiry

References / further reading.....

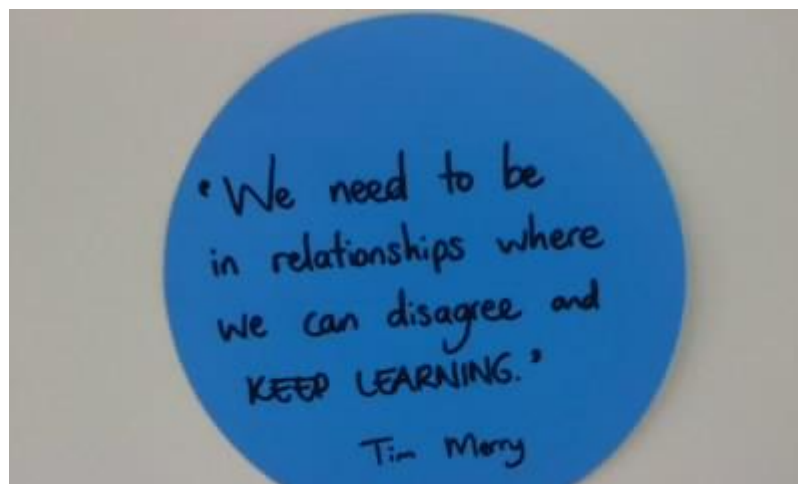
- a. References
- b. Further reading

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This handout is based on four sessions that were delivered simultaneously at LSS Istanbul 2014. It may therefore include elements that weren't covered in your specific session, and gives you an opportunity to explore some new models, ideas and techniques! We hope this handout will serve you in your efforts to be a clear communicator and a good listener. Enjoy.

The objectives of this session are:

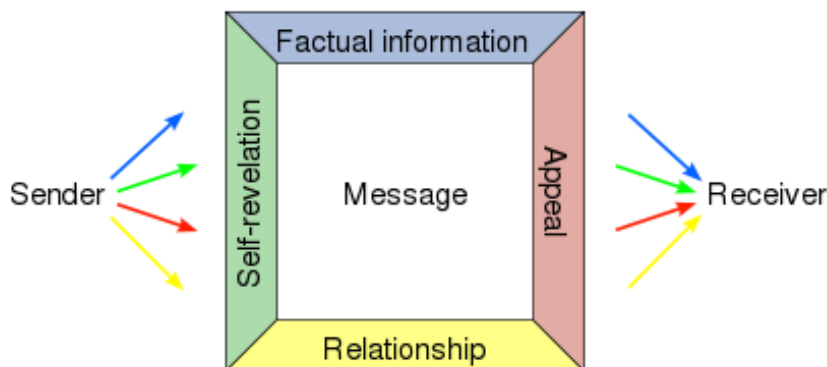
- Improve understanding
- (further) Develop listening
- Learn to use communication as a leadership tool



Overall Communication models.....

a. 4 sides of a message

In any kind of communication there is a *sender* and a *receiver*, with the message going from the sender to the receiver, and feedback from the receiver to the sender. The coding (by the sender) and decoding (by the receiver) of a message depends on the individuals involved and the context of the communication (work, family, 1:1, group, etc). People can say the same thing and mean something completely different, or mean the same and express it in different ways. Schulz von Thun, a German psychologist specialized in inter- and intrapersonal communication, assumes that every message has **four sides**, or contains four aspects. When I make a statement it has four different effects. The person receiving my statement, also listens for one (or more) of these four aspects in the message. The quality of the conversation depends on the manner in which sender and receiver interact.



- the fact aspect (the information I want to convey). Every message contains some kind of information, that is, a rendition of a fact from the sender's point of view. The pure content that the words in themselves reveal is termed factual information. Data, facts, and circumstances are in the foreground. For the factual level there are three applicable criteria: whether or not the facts are true (or correct/incorrect), relevant and sufficient (do other things need to be considered?).
- the self-revelation aspect (what I say about myself). In addition to factual information, which is always the most visible, every message also contains information about the sender. The sender always gives away something about himself. He gives hints about what is going on inside him, how he sees himself, and how he would like to be seen by others. This may occur in an explicit or an implicit way; usually it is implicit, in the form of an unintended self-disclosure. The receiver is taking it all in with the self-statement ear/arrow. Questions s/he might think about are: What does this tell me about the other? What kind of person are they? What is their disposition?
- the relationship aspect (how I relate to you). Every message also says something about the relationship between sender and receiver, how the sender feels about the receiver, about how they are connected with each other. This side of the message is often expressed through tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions (nonverbal signals) as well as through the way something is said, the choice of words. The receiver often has an especially (overly) sensitive relationship ear. On the basis of this ear the receiver decides how they feel treated by the sender, and what the sender thinks of



them, and how the sender relates to them.

- the appeal aspect (what I want to effect on the part of the receiver). A message normally is not sent “just because,” for no reason or with no intention. Generally it is always linked with a wish to influence the other person in some manner. The sender expects not only that his message will be understood, but also that the recipient will react in some way, that he will take action. This involves wishes, appeals, advice, directions for action, etc. The appeal ear is therefore listening for ‘*What should I do, think, or feel now?*’

According to this theory, the sender thus sends out a message that contains these four aspects, usually with an emphasis on one or two of them. The receiver is able to notice and be aware of all the different aspects, or just a few of them. When there is a different focus between sender and receiver (e.g. the senders’ intention is to emphasize the appeal aspect in the message, the receiver mainly hears the relationship aspect) it can lead to misunderstanding, confusion, or conflict.

b. Distortions in communication

We may develop our skills in extracting all the information from the message but despite our efforts the fact remains that there are other distorting factors in communication. Some of them are due to our species specific limitations and way of relating to the reality and some because of individual biases. Simply put, reality for us is always biased. We have outlined some influences and made a research-based model for thinking about how we distort communication.

The model includes three distinct levels that have different functions. The main point is that we humans have some common and individual ways we select, prefer, distort and generalize information to serve our own needs and make snap decisions based on incomplete or faulty premises.

1. Cognitive Limitations - main results: Select, simplify and make quick decisions.

We humans are limited in our processing power and working memory capacity much like computers. You might have heard of the famous slogan 7 +/-2 units, which would be the normal range of human working memory. With working memory we mean our capacity to hold and process information within our minds. Or if you haven’t heard of “change blindness” we heartily recommend you to google it as it is one funky and counterintuitive fact about our perceptual abilities. The fact that we are limited in our capacity and perception means that we are able to focus and process only so much. Evolutionary wise this has lead our species to adapt highly functioning simplified ways of processing, called heuristics.

What all of this means is that we are prone to notice only the things we pay attention to (i.e. what we find meaningful) and making snap assumptions with limited information (as having more information would serve confuse us and quick decisions are sometimes necessary for survival).



2. Common cognitive biases - main results: Bias toward rejecting change and avoiding harm.

As humans we tend to think information that we already know to be more valid than new information, especially if it acts to disconfirm what we previously thought. We also tend to seek things that confirm what we think and ignore other sources. We even tend to think that information that is repeated more often is more reliable. In decision making we often try to avoid or minimize losses rather maximize gains as a way of resolving anxiety. There are individuals who differ from this as well but most of us tend to bias towards to this direction. Also, despite being called cognitive biases, this level is already mixed with personality factors, like self-esteem or self-efficacy.

What this means is that it is difficult to change people's minds once they are set (boy did we know this one already) and that fear of harm is a very powerful motivator and a deterrent.

3. Individual biases - main results: perceiving reality in a consistent and (mal-?)adaptive way.

Each of us is born with our individual biological blueprint that gets modified and psychological add-ons according to the experiences we have and the decisions we make. We make our values and belief systems, learn through experience and are easily swayed by our emotions. These factors affect the way we understand reality and can be powerful drivers of behavior, both in functional and adaptive ways but also dysfunctional and maladaptive ways.



What can I do about it you ask? **Knowledge** about these factors and **self-awareness** are usually the key. Sufficient knowledge you will find on the internet. Seek self-awareness through honest reflection, discussions and feedback. Some things are easier to see, dispute and change but how do you dispute your world view or go beyond your cognitive capacity? There are answers to these questions but they involve long-term work on yourself and a creative touch. In order to influence others better it is good to try and see what is distorting your message for them, and that is best done **by listening actively**.

Active listening.....

a. Listen-understand-understand emotionally

We'd like to present one simple way of looking at active listening, the listen-understand-understand emotionally model. The main point of this model is to illustrate that there are different levels of understanding from only understanding the issue from your point of view up until intimate understanding of the other's message. This model divides this process into 3 levels that build understanding on top of each other through more complex listening behaviors/tools. Needless to say, the borders are not clear cut and you might not reach the highest understanding even if you do everything "by the book." If you are not genuinely interested in the person you are merely pretending active listening, which is a form of unwanted manipulation.

Listening

On this level you are only paying attention to the words but hardly go any deeper than that. You might be able to repeat what was just said, but you would not be able to condense the core message if you'd be asked.

Tools to show and reach this level:

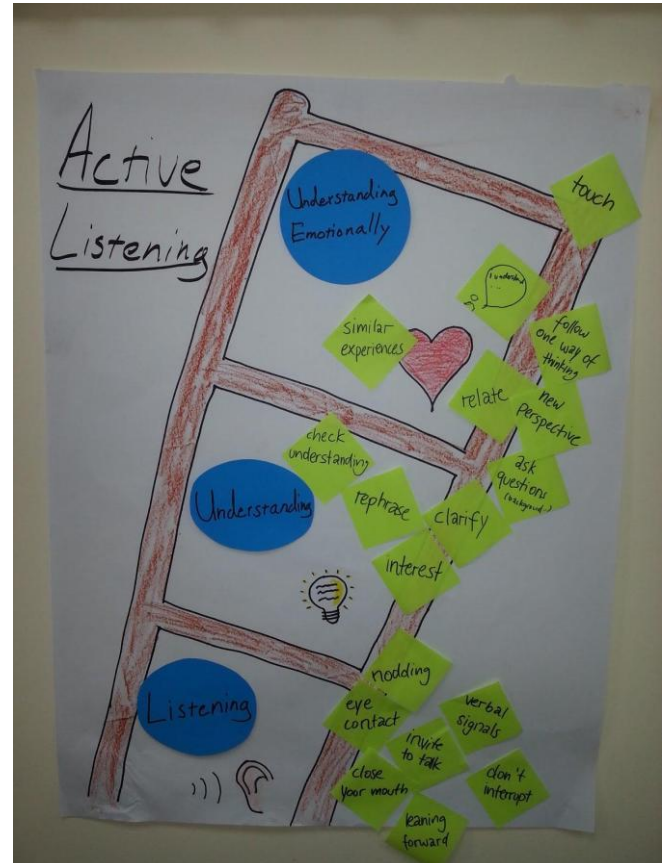
- Body language to show you are listening
- Verbal validation (mhm, go on)
- Not interrupting

Understanding

On this level you are able to understand the point of what was said - you can see what the other had in mind and are not bound to your own subjective view anymore.

Tools:

- Checking understanding by paraphrasing, clarifying
- Showing interest
- Asking questions



Understanding emotionally

On this level you can not only understand the point of what was being communicated but also the feelings behind them. Here you will have to rely more extensively on non-verbal cues than before.

Tools:

- Empathy, having similar experiences
- Establishing rapport by mirroring body posture
- Observing non-verbal communication
- Questions about emotions
- Patience, true understanding doesn't come easy

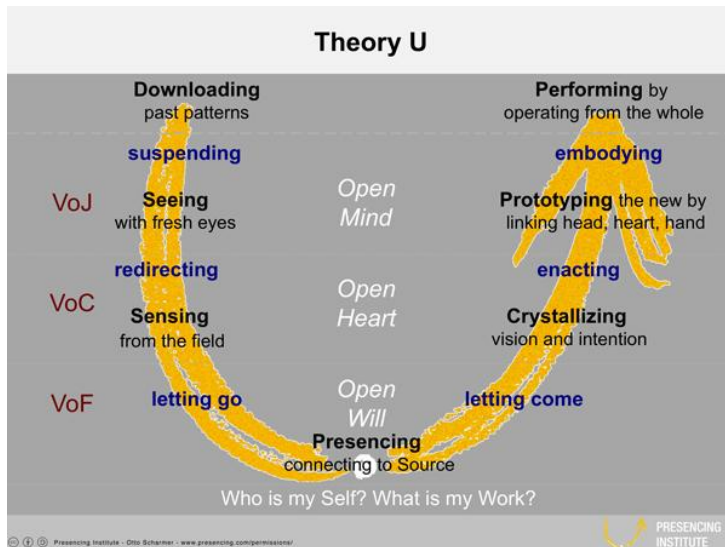
b. Theory U

Theory U (developed by Otto Scharmer, scholar at MIT) is a framework, a method for leading profound change, and a way of being. It works with the notion that the quality of the results we create in any kind of social system, depends on the quality of the awareness or attention people in that system operate from. *'The quality of the intervention depends on the interior quality of the intervener.'* (Bill O'Brien)

The success of our actions as changemakers (or as friends, colleagues, partners) doesn't depend on *what* we do, or on *how* we do what we do, but on the *inner place* from which we act. We are often not aware of the inner place from which we're operating. Scharmer calls this 'the blind spot of leadership':



There is much to say and learn about Theory U, and we warmly invite you to check out the website from the Presencing Institute (www.presencing.com), which holds a wealth of resources. We'll go through the framework briefly, emphasizing the listening aspect of the model as inspiration to think about what 'active listening' might mean.



The image above describes the process of leading and learning from the emerging future (rather than learning from past events, which most learning methodologies are based on). Scharmer distinguishes four levels of listening: 'downloading', 'seeing', 'sensing', and 'presencing'.

When we listen from a 'downloading' place, we simply hear things we already know – we're listening for past patterns that confirm our preconceived ideas and judgements. Listening from this place results in outcomes and behaviours we already know. When we suspend our *Voice of Judgement*, in other words, when we open our mind, we start 'seeing' with fresh eyes. We are able to listen with curiosity and without judgement. We might question some of our assumptions. Moving further down the U, opening our heart and letting go of the *Voice of Cynicism*, we redirect our attention and start 'sensing'. Sensing what is happening around us, what is happening for our team members, what is happening in ourselves. When we listen with an open heart, we listen with kindness and compassion. The fourth level of listening, 'Presencing' – combining the words "sensing" (feeling the future possibility) and "presence" (the state of being in the present moment) – means "sensing and actualizing one's highest future possibility – acting from the presence of what is wanting to emerge." To listen from this place, requires us to let go of our *Voice of Fear*, to connect to our open will. It invites us to be fully present, to listen with full awareness – to tune in to the future that wants to emerge.

We can use these different levels of listening when we are engaged in communication with others, as a tool of active listening, and notice when judgement, cynicism, or fear might influence what we are hearing and how we are responding.

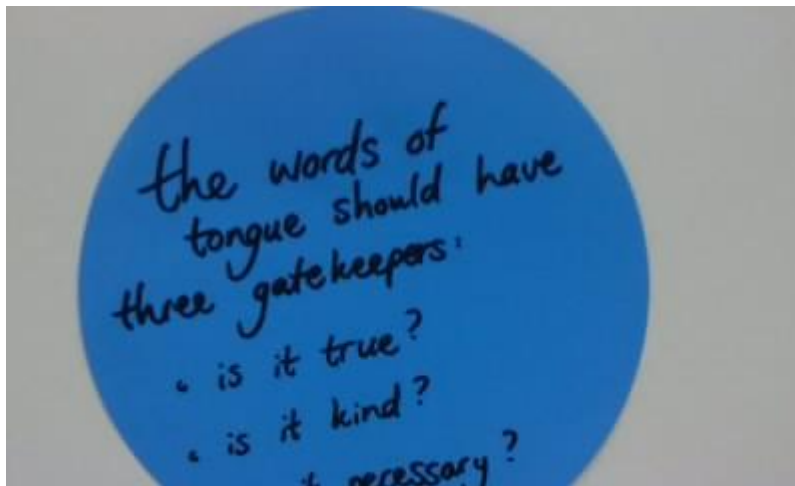
From active listening, we might take steps – acting or responding to what we hear. These stages are represented in the right side of the U in the image above: summarized in the stages of 'crystallizing', 'prototyping' and 'performing'. After going down the left side of the U, reflecting at the bottom of the U, you go up the U and act from the insights gathered. These stages are more apparent in a process of change (e.g. in a company going through a visioning process).

Feedback.....

a. Why is feedback important?

Feedback is a unique chance to see yourself and your behaviour through the eyes of another person. In order to receive feedback, your actions must have left an impression (be it positive or negative) on someone. This is the first and foremost message of any feedback: You and your behaviour have an impact on your environment. The nature of this impact, and the impression others have, could be fundamentally different from your own perception – and are yet not “less true”. Feedback can be seen as a *gift*: as a package of information, nicely wrapped, related to a specific topic, that has been offered to you, or that you are offering to somebody. Like any gift, it can be bigger or smaller, richer or poorer, nicer or nastier; and, also like any gift, you can *choose whether to use it or not*. Some people have a certain talent of giving constructive feedback; others just don’t know how to approach it, same as with birthday presents. The important aspect is that when you comprehend those characteristics of feedback as a “*gift*”, you can detach from it, analyze it, and it becomes easier to take and give it.

As such, **Feedback** is one of the best tools you have for *motivating people, improving work efficiency, developing others, creating a proper work environment, creating synergy and connection* in your team. In the right hands and with the proper perception, this tool can do wonders. But, as any skill, giving and receiving feedback is something that has to be learned, practiced, improved; it is a skill you develop over time.



We develop through feedback, and we help other people develop by delivering it. In order to provide opportunities for growth and empower the receiver, feedback should be delivered in a way that it can be accepted and digested. Some general guidelines would be:

- **Personalise your feedback:** Make clear that what you are saying is your personal opinion, not an overall truth. Send “I” messages (“In my opinion...”, “I felt...”, ...)
- **Do not judge:** State facts, as you remember them, but do not judge if right or wrong, good or bad, smart or stupid.
- **Provide specific examples:** Refer your feedback to situations you both remember, to make it tangible, concrete and credible.

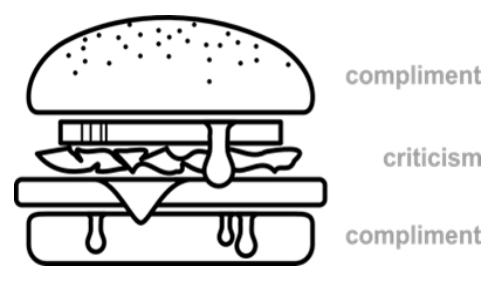


- **Feedback behaviour:** Do not feedback the person (“You are great/stupid/selfish”), as this is generalising and hard to take for the receiver. There are exceptions to this guideline – see “Levels of Feedback”
- **Make improvement suggestions:** These suggestions should be concrete and possible to achieve for the feedback receiver (“next time, you could...”)
- **Be honest and true:** With all feedback – positive and negative – stay honest. Most things can be said and taken, the question is *how* something is said.
- **Time your feedback:** Wait for the right moment, when both you and the receiver can focus on the feedback process. Also, ask the receiver if he would like to get feedback (now).
- Watch the **“BUT”!** The word "but", along with its cousins "however" and "although," when said in the middle of a thought, create contradictions or mixed messages. In essence, putting "but" in the middle tells the other person, "Don't believe a thing I said before".

b. Sandwich model

One very common and well-known model for feedback delivery is the sandwich model. With this method, you

- start with some specific positive feedback
- continue with specific improvement points
- end with a general positive observation and encouragement for the future.



The main purpose of a sandwich model is to balance both concrete and specific positive and negative feedback. We need positive feedback in order to know what we are already doing right, what we might want to keep or maybe even develop further. We also need negative feedback, to know which specific behaviours we might want to change and how. The sandwich model takes care of this balance.

However, often people see “feedback as a gift” metaphor too literally and try to “sugar-coat” negative feedback with general positive clichés to hide it. This is not beneficial, because then none of the feedback parts can reach its goal. The positive feedback (the “bread”) is too general and too unimportant to have an impact, and people receiving it are already expecting the “meat” and not even listening to the positive part. The negative part might not reach its goal because it has been hidden in the positive information.

c. BIO model

Feedback is very beneficial if each piece of information (whether it is positive or negative) follows a certain structure. One model you can use is the BIO model.

- **B** – behavior: start the sentence with an observation (not a judgement) of a behaviour – “I noticed that ... (you left the meeting early yesterday).” Not “I didn’t like it when ...”
- **I** – impact/impression: continue with what impression that behaviour made on you, how it made you feel, how you reacted to it – “I had the impression that you do not care about the topic.”



- **O** – outcome (desired): finish with what you would like to see in the future, what would the desired outcome be – “I believe I would be much more comfortable if you announced in advance if you need to leave early.”

A good healthy combination of BIO and the sandwich model is recommended. A BIO sandwich is very healthy, since every slice of bread and every steak in it is carefully BIO grown and an important part of the whole meal. We don't put any artificial ingredients into our BIO sandwich – everything you get is good for you and makes you grow. We don't deal with chewed over, stale and outdated ingredients – everything we offer is fresh and made specifically for you. Sometimes it's good to have a vegetarian version, and sometimes we only need the protein to make our muscles grow faster. Keep your BIO sandwich fresh, and you are bound to stay in good shape!

d. Receiving feedback

Receiving feedback is as challenging as giving feedback. It becomes easier if the feedback you get is delivered in a good way (see above). However, in order to take full advantage, and to digest also the parts which are hard to chew, the following guidelines might help:

- **Ask for feedback:** When having completed a task, a process, or any action you would like to hear others' opinion on, ask for feedback. This makes it easier for your partner to deliver feedback. Additionally, you can ensure that you receive feedback at the right time – when you are ready for it.
- **Ask for clarification:** If you do not understand, ask for clarification. However, try not to interrupt, and listen carefully before asking.
- **Do not explain:** It is tempting to defend oneself, and justify one's behaviour. As feedback reflects a personal impression, there is no right or wrong, but different perceptions. Accept it as that, and see it as an opportunity to gain new perspectives.
- **Stay calm and open-minded:** No matter how hard the feedback is to take, stay calm, polite and open-minded. Even if you disagree, there is something to learn from every feedback point you get.
- Always say “**thank you**”. Remember that the feedback is for *you*, and s/he took time and effort to prepare it. So you should thank for it, like you would do for any gift, either you like it or not.
- Take the time to **analyze** what you received, and only afterwards **decide** whether to use it or not.

e. The levels of feedback

Next to the general guidelines and basic models on *how* to deliver feedback, you need to consider *what kind* of feedback you want and can give. There are different levels of feedback, and the one you choose depends a lot on the circumstances, the subject of feedback, the relation you have to the person, and the responsibility you feel yourself. Feedback can be given on different levels that have a different impact and require different conditions. These levels are:

1. Task level
2. Process level
3. Self-regulation level
4. Self level

Task level

This level includes feedback about how well a task is being accomplished or performed, such as distinguishing correct from incorrect answers, acquiring more or different information, and building more surface knowledge. This type of feedback is most common and is often called corrective feedback or knowledge of results, and it can relate to correctness, neatness, behaviour, or some other criterion related to task accomplishment.

Examples:

“This is right/wrong.”

“You avoid eye-contact when speaking.”

“You did a very clear schedule.”

Process level

Feedback on the process level is more specific to the processes underlying tasks or relating and extending tasks. Such feedback concerns information about relations in the environment, relations perceived by a person, and relations between the environment and the person's perceptions. The side effect of process feedback is to help people realize their own strategies for error detection, thus providing themselves with feedback.

Examples:

„When you start working on an assignment, you usually make a plan first, which helps you keep your eyes on the goal.“

„When you answer questions, you often start with „I don't know,“, which gives the impression that you are unsure of yourself. If you need time to think, stay quiet for a second.“

„When you are leading a meeting, you often rush things too much and prevent people from stating their mind. Take more time.“

Self-regulation level

Self-regulation involves an interplay between commitment, control, and confidence. It addresses the way you monitor, direct, and regulate actions toward the goal. This is feedback that builds up on the process level feedback, and it implies autonomy, self-control, self-direction, and self-discipline. In the end, it is encouraging and empowering the person to feedback themselves. Often it comes in form of questions, rather than statements.

Examples:

„What did you do differently this time to make it work?“

„Observe your body language when you feel comfortable on stage. Notice how different it is from when you feel uncomfortable.“

„I noticed a change in your behaviour. What did you do?“

Self level

We include a final level of feedback not because it is effective but because it is often present and too often used instead of other levels. It focuses on the personality of the person and usually contains little task-related information and is rarely converted into more engagement, commitment to the goals, enhanced self-efficacy, or understanding about the task. It can have an impact on learning only if it leads to changes in students' effort, engagement, or feelings of efficacy in relation to the learning or to the strategies they use when attempting to understand tasks.

It is important, however, to distinguish between praise that directs attention away from the task to the self (because such praise has low information value to achievement and learning) and praise directed to the effort, self-regulation, engagement, or processes relating to the task and its performance. This latter type of praise can assist in enhancing self-efficacy and thus can be converted by students back into impact on the task, and hence the effects are much greater.

Example:

“You’re really great because you have diligently completed this task by applying this concept”

„You have this amazing open and adapting personality which allows you to establish rapport so easily – and I believe it also sometimes prevents you from stating your mind when you disagree.“

Note that as you move up the levels of feedback, the relationship becomes more and more important. Feedback on self-level can have a great impact only if it comes from a person you trust and believe in their positive intentions. Therefore make sure you establish powerful rapport before you move up the levels of feedback, as it will be much easier for the person receiving the feedback to accept it and put effort into creating a change.



Sending an effective message.....

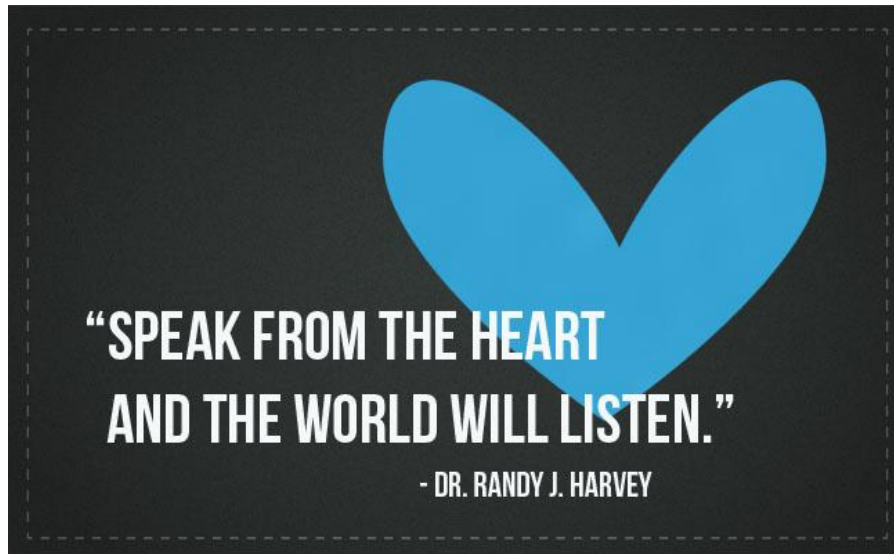
Sending an effective message, starts with being aware and clear about what message you actually want to send. What is it you really want to say? What do you want the other person to know, to remember, to act on? What is the intention behind your words?

From this clarity, think about what might be the best *medium* to send your message: is that face to face, in a public speech, in a (handwritten!) letter, an email, a post on facebook, or an advertisement in your local newspaper?

When deciding on the medium, keep in mind your *audience* (age, background, language, etc) and the *context* (ranging from cultural/political/social context to the time of day, the location and other factors that might influence your message).



And perhaps most importantly (and not always easy 😊): practice to speak from your heart – speak with honesty, clarity, and kindness.



a. Minto Pyramid Principle

The Minto Pyramid Principle, a structured thinking and communication technique designed by Barbara Minto, provides a process and system for organizing ideas to create compelling business documents, and boost the effectiveness of your communication. It helps you organizing your thinking so that it jumps easily off the page to lodge in a reader's mind. It notes that people ideally work out their thinking by creating pyramids of ideas, for example in grouping together low-level facts they see as similar, drawing an insight from having seen the similarity and forming a new grouping of related insights.

Extended thinking eventually ends in a single pyramid of ideas, at many levels, obeying logical rules, and held together by a single thought. Communicating the thinking requires only that you guide the reader down the pyramid.

The technique applies to every type of document in which your purpose is *to offer your thinking to a reader* – email, 1-page memo, multi-page report, or formal slide presentation. Although the concept is often talked about in the context of writing, it is a way of thinking that can be effectively used both in written and oral communication.

Framing.....

“I have a dream.” or “Yes we can.” Two sentences that are examples of powerful framing: they provide a clear image that people can connect with and find convincing. Framing is an integral part of all of our communications – in media, in politics, in personal conversation, in childrenbooks, in movies. As such, it is a powerful tool and it’s helpful to be aware of its existence and influence. See for example the TED talk by Chimamanda Adichie on ‘The danger



of a single story'. People can be depicted as freedom fighters, or as terrorists. Economic growth as the solution, or as the very reason for the world's major problems. Our worldview is made up of various 'frames' – e.g. images of how the world works, what is right and what is wrong, what success looks like. These frames are formed by the culture we grow up in, our family, our personal history, as well as events that happen, how these are portrayed by the media, etc.

Every message we sent out, we also frame in a specific way. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Some of the aspects involved in framing we have already discussed in earlier parts of this handout. Here we want to go into one method that can be used for framing that is called appreciative inquiry.

a. Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of 'what is' to pursue dreams and possibilities of 'what could be'; a cooperative search for strengths, passions and life---giving forces that are found within every system and that hold potential for inspired, positive change. (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)

Appreciative Inquiry (A.I.) is an alternative approach to problem solving, as it does not focus on the problem, but on what is working well. And rather than analyzing possible causes, it looks for 'what might and should be'. A.I. works with asking questions that strengthen a systems' capacity to understand, anticipate and increase positive potential. It thus uses a different framing – unconditional positive questions – which results in a different process and outcome.

A.I. works with a few assumptions such as: 'what we focus on becomes our reality', 'the act of asking questions influences the community in some way', 'it is important to value differences', 'the language we use creates our reality', and follows a 4 stage process of 'discovery', 'dream', 'design', and 'destiny'. These are specific to when you are using A.I. in an organization, community or company with the purpose of creating positive change in that setting. The basis of A.I., the act of asking positive questions, a way of framing something, can be used in any conversation and context.

References / further reading.....

a. References

Theory U: www.presencing.com

Effective message: [Minto Pyramid Principle -- Book](#)

Appreciative Inquiry: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

Framing: Chimamanda Adichie: [the danger of a single story](#)

b. Further reading

WEB LINKS

- [Communication Skills](#)
- [5 ways to listen better](#)
- [Clean Language](#)
- [The '4 Ears' Model of Communication](#)
- [Ladder of Inference](#)
- [Johari's Window](#)
- [Active Listening](#)
- [Giving and receiving feedback](#)
- [I-messages](#)
- Social Styles and Effective Performance; book ([Link](#))
- The Social Styles Handbook; book ([Link](#))

BOOKS

- Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback
- O'Connor, J. and Seymour, J. (1993). Introducing NLP: Psychological Skills for Understanding and Influencing People
- Theory U, Otto Scharmer
- Mastering Communication, Nick Stanton
- Rule #1 Stop talking, Linda Eve Diamond
- The lost art of listening, Michael P. Nichols
- Giving and perceiving performance feedback, Peter R. Gaber