



REFLECTIONS

Gender & Communication

A Note from the editor

Creetings! My name is Heidi Tandy, Programming Assistant in the Office of Student Involvement, and I will be coordinating the newsletters for the Advancing Women Mentoring Program this year. Our newsletter has been titled, "Reflections". We want to highlight the importance of intentional reflection this year as you work in your partnerships. During the busyness of the day-to-day grind, reflecting on our lives can become low on our priority list. Whether it's reflecting on the monthly topic, the impact of the mentoring relationship, or the many roles we play, we hope that you are able to incorporate even a small bit of reflection into your meetings.

Throughout this year we will be collecting reflections on the mentoring experience from both mentors and mentees in the program to be used in our final newsletter and end of the year celebration. You don't have to wait until the end of the year to submit a reflection! If at any time this year you would like to email us a brief (500 words or less) piece documenting any highlights of your experience in the program, we will include it in our final newsletter of 2012-2013.

Additionally, we are always looking to improve our program, including our newsletters. If you have any feedback or would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email hjtandy@iupui.edu.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Lead IUPUI
Campus Center, Suite 370
317.274.3931
www.lead.iupui.edu
lead@iupui.edu

Office for Women
University Library, Room 1140
317.278.3600
www.ofw.iupui.edu
ksgrove@iupui.edu

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I believe that words can help us move or keep us paralyzed, and that our choices of language and verbal tone have something—a great deal—to do with how we live our lives and whom we end up speaking with and hearing; and that we can deflect words by trivialization, of course, but also by ritualized respect, or we can let them enter our souls and mix with the juices of our minds. – Adrienne Rich

How do you communicate?

According to Merriam-Webster, Communication is defined as the “process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior”.¹ In today’s world, communication is diverse and occurs at a blinding pace. This month’s newsletter features two aspects of communication; verbal and non-verbal; and gender and communication.

VERBAL VS. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication has been estimated to account for as much as 93% of all communication and may include everything from how we dress to body language, facial expressions and more. Much of our non-verbal communication occurs subconsciously as a developed habit. According to a 2011 article by Jennifer Myers², body language can send strong signals that may even override your verbal message. Myers references a study in which employers stated they were less likely to hire someone who failed to smile, portrayed poor body posture, and failed to maintain eye contact. Why? Many of these gestures were thought to signal anxiety and lack of confidence regardless of what the candidate was expressing verbally. Myers further notes that women are especially prone to playing with their hair or touching their face during an interview which is often interpreted as nervousness or as a sign of insecurity. Though this simple gesture may just be to remove the hair from one’s eyes, the truth is that our gestures and body language often communicate far more than our words; messages that may be interpreted in any number of different ways.

GENDER & COMMUNICATION

Some of the best studies on the topic of gender and communication have been conducted by Dr. Deborah Tannen, University Professor and Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University. In her text, *You Just*

Don’t Understand: Men and Women in Conversation, Tannen notes that our conversations often resemble negotiations and are viewed from different perspectives. Men, for example, often respond as “as an individual in a hierarchical social order” (p. 24) and approach conversation with the need to maintain the upper hand or preserve their independence and avoid failure. Women, however, tend to approach conversations as an individual in a “network of connections” where conversations are opportunities to give/receive confirmation and support with an emphasis on building community (p. 25). These varying conversation styles often influence how communication and conversation occurs in the workplace. In another text by Tannen, *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men at Work*, the author writes that these conversational differences may lead to miscommunication. While men tend to converse using joking, teasing, and communicate in a way to preserve their perceived hierarchical position, women tend to converse so as to “maintain equality”, considering other’s feelings and avoid conflict with authority (p. 23). Many women naturally prefer to avoid conflict and the need to maintain a sense of equality is sometimes perceived as lack of confidence (p. 23). For Tannen, not all men or women can be stereotyped into these descriptions. Neither of these approaches is “wrong” but simply a part of their psychological and social upbringings. Nevertheless, understanding that men and women communicate and interpret communication in different ways is important as we interact as a society.



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TIPS FOR IMPROVING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

1 EYE CONTACT: TRY TO MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT 80% OF THE TIME AS IT COMMUNICATES INTEREST AND ATTENTIVENESS.

2 AVOID SLOUCHING SLUMPING YOUR SHOULDERS OR CROSSING YOUR ARMS AS THIS CAN COMMUNICATE LACK OF INTEREST, LOW SELF ESTEEM, OR BEING CLOSED OFF.

3. HAND GESTURES: IT’S OK TO EXPRESS A POINT BUT TOO MANY HAND GESTURES CAN BE DISTRACTING. FINDING A GOOD BALANCE IS ESSENTIAL.

Sources:

1. Merriam-Webster (2012). <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>
2. Myers, J. (2011, January 11). It’s not what you say, it’s how you move; Body language can speak volumes – and send strong signals that undermine your message. *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), pp. B13.
3. Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don’t understand: Men and women in conversation*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
4. Tannen, D. (1994). *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and men at work*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Women in Leadership:

Women in the workforce face a double bind

by Kathleen Grove, Director IUPUI Office for Women

Women now constitute half of all workers on U.S. payrolls. This is what The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation¹, calls the "new normal." Today's workplace is well-populated by both women and men. The traditional breadwinner/homemaker economic model now represents only 20.7% of our family structures.

Yet organizational cultures created to fit that traditional economic model linger on creating challenges for women interested in advancing in the workplace. Gender role expectations based on cultural stereotypes about appropriate behaviors and traits for men and women persist. Even though often unconscious and held by both genders, these "unconscious gender schemas"² result in women being undervalued in the workplace.

Many organizational cultures reward a leadership style that is "agentic", i.e., based on ideas of self-agency and having traits such as being ambitious, assertive, self-confident, forceful, individualistic. Communication in such cultures is used to establish status and



authority and information is seen as power to be shared strategically. Public speaking in meetings, etc. is done to get attention and promote an idea or agenda. However, women who adopt this style are at risk of being disliked and less effective because they are stepping out of gender role expectations that they will be communal, warm and friendly. Alice Eagly, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University, calls this the double bind: "Female leaders face a dilemma. The prescriptions for the female gender role stipulate that women be especially communal, and the prescription for most leadership roles stipulate that leaders be especially agentic. ...These expectations create a double bind for women."³

Women have to reconcile these competing expectations. On the one hand if they act "just like a man" they may be disliked. On the other hand, if they are too warm and friendly they are accused of not being "tough enough." Eagly suggests that women have to forge a "middle way" blending "assertive competence" with "supportive friendliness."

Another arena where gender role expectations disadvantage women is in self-promotion. To advance, one must let others know of your competency and expertise. Men can blow their own horn without penalty in the workplace. But women are expected to be more modest and may face negative responses if they promote themselves in a "boastful" way.

Again, women have to find a way to promote themselves and call attention to their achievements without alienating others.

However, contemporary organizations are undergoing change and organizational norms will adapt to forces such as technological growth, population diversity and the blurring of geopolitical boundaries. Current leadership gurus⁴ are calling for a more diverse array of styles

"For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships."

Deborah Tannen, Ph.D.

to lead these new organizational structures and to enable a more fluid and responsive adaptation to market forces. Many qualities traditionally associated with “feminine” traits such as collaboration, interpersonal skills, and empathy are being recognized as characteristics for success in these new contexts.

But until gender schemas are recognized and overcome and stereotypical assumptions are not utilized to hire, evaluate and promote women, it is important for women in the workforce to think about the “double bind” and how to navigate around it.

1. The Shriver Report, *A Woman's Nation Changes Everything*, Edited by Heather Boushey and Ann O'Leary, A Study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress
2. “Why So Slow, The Advancement of Women”, Virginia Valian, MIT Press, 1999, p. 6
3. “Through the Labyrinth, the truth about how women become leaders, Alice H. Eagly, Linda L. Carli, Harvard Business School Press, 2007, p. 101
4. For example, see Peter Senge's “The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization” and James Kouzes and Barry Posner, “The Leadership Challenge.”

“Maturity is knowing to say what to whom and when...One should know also how to hold things back and assume his or her own responsibility.”

Marjane Satrapi



Numbers of Women in Leadership Positions Still Small

Today women constitute half of the paid labor force and almost 60% of college graduates, yet our representation at the top in leadership positions and executive suites still is not on a par with men's. In the “pyramid effect”, women constitute the majority of lower and middle level workers but a much smaller percentage at the top. Research demonstrates that many institutional and cultural obstacles make women's leadership journey “a long and winding road.

Percentage of Women in Leadership Positions

U.S. Senate: 20%

House of Representatives: 16.7%

State Governors: 10%

(Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University)

Cities over 100,000 Mayors: 15%

State Legislatures: 24%

University Presidents: 23%

Full professors: 26%

Fortune 500 companies CEO's: 3%

Board Directors of Fortune 500 companies: 15% women

Law firm partners: 18% women

Film directors, producers, etc. : 16%

Military officers: 15% women

Protestant clergy and Rabbis: 15%

Non-profits with \$25 million budgets: 21%
(The White House Project, Benchmarking Women's Leadership, 2009)



Offered in partnership with LEAD IUPUI and the Office for Women, the Advancing Women Mentoring Program exists to empower individuals toward academic, personal, and professional success by engaging participants in authentic mentoring partnerships.