



Communication 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.

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Why Communication Styles?

According to www.quintcareers.com, by far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. This ability does not always come naturally and without a work for students. Learning to communicate in a healthy, effective way isn't just a skill to be learned in a basic communication or speech class, but a journey over time throughout students' academic and professional careers. We hope this topic spurs on great discussion between you and your mentees this month as you continue these mentoring relationships!

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 handout features two aspects of communication; verbal and non-verbal; and gender and communication.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Advancing Women Events -

- **Do you Communicate to be Seen and Heard?: Communication Challenges for Women in the Workplace**
January 19, 2012; 12:00 – 1:00 PM,
Campus Center, CE 307
Presenter: Dr. Kristina Sheeler,
Department of Communication Studies
Chair, Associate Professor of
Communication Studies
- **Keys to Success: Tips for Networking and Presenting Yourself Professionally**
February 23, 2012; 12:00 – 1:00 PM
Campus Center, CE 308
Presenter: Jill Vanderwall, Experiential
Learning Coordinator; University College,
IUPUI

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.

Tips for Improving Non-Verbal Communication (Myers, 2011)

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.

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 "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 biological upbringings. Nevertheless, understanding that men and women communicate and interpret communication in different ways is important as we interact as a society.

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.

For more information about Dr. Deborah Tannen, visit her website at <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/bio.html>

Communication Styles Discussion Points

Welcome back! We hope that your winter break was a restful end to 2011 and that you are ready to have a great start to semester 2! Thank you for your feedback in the AWMP survey that was sent out at the end of the year. We received helpful information on what is working and what still needs improvement in this new endeavor. Be encouraged that the mentoring work that you are a part of is helping to challenge and support women at IUPUI!

If you haven't scheduled a first meeting of the semester with your mentee, please try to do so within the first few weeks of classes. It might be a good idea to try out a biweekly or weekly time as the semester begins, especially if you haven't gotten on a regular schedule with your meetings. We all feel the weight of busy schedules and what seems like a lack of hours in the day. With that said, thank you for making this program a priority this year!

The questions this month focus on communication styles. Communication styles vary greatly, from the differences between men and women to the importance of identifying key non-verbal cues. As always, feel free to adapt these questions or simply use them as a starting point for conversation.

Discussion points:

- **Follow up/check in**
 - Check in with each other—what has happened since you last met?
 - How was your winter break? Were you able to find time to work on rest and work/life balance?
 - Where are you with your goals? Have you made any progress/had any setbacks? Do you have any new goals or even resolutions that you'd like to share as we begin this semester?
 - What does your schedule look like this semester? What courses are you taking? As you look over your schedule and syllabi for the semester, do you anticipate being overwhelmed?
- **Communication Style Discussion Questions**
 - How would you describe your own style of communication?
 - From your own experiences, how do you see communication looking different between men and women?
 - What non-verbal cues do you notice or find distracting? What do you think about the often-quoted statistic that non-verbal communication makes up as much as 93% of all communication? Do you see this as being accurate?
 - Who in your life do you view as a great communicator? This could be a public figure or someone you know personally, but what qualities or characteristics of his or her communication style would you like to emulate?
 - What are a few practical ways that you could work on your communication skills this semester? How do you think you have grown in this area during your time at IUPUI?

Other Great Upcoming Events

Women Creating Excellence at IUPUI

January 9 – 27, Cultural Arts Gallery
Campus Center, 2nd Floor

This exhibit celebrates the great accomplishments of over 100 women who have been instrumental in contributing to the growth and development of IUPUI since the University's founding in 1969.
Sponsored by the IUPUI Office for Women & the University Library.

Women, Peace, & Reconciliation in West Africa

*An Afternoon with Nobel Peace Prize laureate,
peace activist, and author, Leymah Gbowee*

February 16, 2012, 2:30- 4:00 pm
Robert H. McKinney School of Law,
Wynne Courtroom, IUPUI

See attached flyer for more information about this
incredible opportunity!