The SpeechImprovement
Company

The Power of Speaking Clearly:

Essential Communication Skills for Managers

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This e-book was assembled from work done by the team of Executive Communication Coaches at The Speech Improvement Company. Visit us at www.speechimprovement.com

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Introduction: Why This Matters

Effective communication isn't just a leadership skill—it's a critical success factor. Often, when the stakes are high and the margins for error are slim, important communication skills can't be left to chance—clarity, precision, and impact are non-negotiable. Yet, many managers did not initially aim to become leaders. Earlier in their careers, as individual contributors, they had excelled. **However, the skills that earned them recognition and rewards often don't translate seamlessly to leadership demands.**

Now, as managers, they're expected to communicate in ways that inspire teams, persuade stakeholders, delegate effectively, and motivate performance. They must deliver presentations that secure funding, provide clear guidance in high-pressure situations, and handle sensitive conversations with diplomacy and tact. In short, they need to influence and lead—not just inform. Poor communication doesn't just lead to missed deadlines or small budget overruns—it can impact profitability, increase legal or financial risks, jeopardize safety, derail regulatory approvals, and erode organizational trust.

This eBook bridges that gap. It equips executives and managers at all levels with proven strategies, tools, and techniques to master the art of management communication. Drawing on over 60 years of experience coaching leaders from companies such as Merck, Bank of America, KPMG, Apple, and Amazon, the insights here will help you communicate with authority, empathy, clarity, and confidence—skills essential for leadership in today's complex business landscape.

Communicating with Authority—Recorded Lesson

Being able to communicate assertively and confidently helps people succeed in business and personal relationships. It begins with a mindset and requires attention to nonverbal communication and delivery style. This 30-minute recorded lesson will introduce you to the best practices.

Executive Communication Coaches [Robin Golinski](#) and [Laura Mathis](#) introduce essential skills you can apply immediately to speak more clearly, persuasively, and confidently—whether one-on-one, in a small group, or in front of thousands.

WATCH NOW

Motivation: The Damage That $100 Can Do

By Dr. Ethan Becker, President

What Pushes People to Succeed?
What people are motivated by is what impels them to produce. It is the part of their relationship to the people and environment where they work that pushes them into getting projects done. The three categories are ethos, emotion, and logic.

Ethos
If you are motivated by ethos, you feel moved to work harder because the person who asks you to do the work has credibility in your eyes, or when the project is big or important. If your boss doesn't have credibility and you're motivated by ethos, their opinion of what is important may not matter as much. If, on the other hand, he says that the CEO wants you to do this project, that it's the one that everyone else wants to work on, you jump. For others, credibility does nothing. If a celebrity tries to get through airport security and the guard is not motivated by credibility, the famous person waits. But if the governor shows up at your restaurant, you're the host, and ethos matters, you give her the best table.

Emotion

Someone who is motivated by emotion gets fired up easily. When you come to such a person and say, "Can you believe what Tom just said?" He replies, "Oh, really? Nooo, I can't believe it." This person responds when you say that you need something done right away and it's urgent. In fact, it doesn't matter what the emotion is—happy, sad, or angry. This person needs to see emotion to care about what he is doing. Again, this doesn't work if the person is pushed by ethos: they will look at you and scoff, "You can't tell me what to do." The logical person will say, "Stop your whining." For the person who is pushed by emotion, seeing your emotion gets him motivated.

Logic

Someone who is motivated by logic needs to understand the reasoning behind what she is doing, and she needs to hear it from you in a logical way. She needs you to speak in a calm, clear tone that reveals why what needs to be done is important, what thought brought you to this point, and how that will be the best solution. For instance, an IT team is setting up for a conference, and it's taking longer than planned. If the team members are motivated by logic, and the manager says, "The CEO wants this done," they won't care. If he says, "We have to get this done!" they will tell him to relax. But if the manager says, "Two of the computers aren't working. Looks like it's a software problem. We need them at 9 a.m. So we're going to skip the opening reception and we'll get dinner when we're finished." They will finish without thinking twice.

What Pulls People into a Project?

What people are motivated for is what they are motivated toward. It is the part of their relationship to the people and environment where they work that pulls them into action. The three categories are achievement, recognition, and power.

Achievement

If you're motivated for achievement, and your job is to prepare the annual report, you just want to get it done. You don't want a mention at the annual meeting or your name on the cover, and you don't want to hear that if you do a good job, you can run the project next year. This type of person rarely needs kudos and isn't as concerned with his title or career track. People who are motivated by achievement carry their lunch box to work, clock in, and do their job well. They take an hour for lunch. At five o'clock they go home. If you need them to do more, speak in the language they are motivated by (ethos, emotion, or logic) and clarify the job you need them to do. They will get it done because finishing the job to the standards you set is what matters most.

Recognition

Someone who is motivated for recognition needs public acclaim. These people look forward to having their names called at a public meeting. This isn't vanity, and even if you think it is, it is what some of your people need. When they don't get it, they become less motivated. Worse, when you give the recognition to someone else, these people's resentment builds and their productivity starts to drop. Don't give them recognition if they

don't deserve it, but make sure you have been clear about what they need to do to be recognized. They want the plaque they can hang on their cubicle wall. But remember, you cannot just give a plaque to everyone because people who are motivated for achievement may get offended or not show up for the award ceremony. People who are motivated for power want the award only if it comes with a new title or a project to run.

Power
If your employee is motivated for power, he wants control. He needs the ability to make decisions and the authority to direct the outcomes of his projects. When a power-motivated employee doesn't have control, he can be passive-aggressive and not collaborate. When he feels completely unmotivated, he can sabotage others' work in order to feel that he is in control. Instead of telling a power-motivated person what to do, ask questions so that he can come to the decision on his own.

While an achievement-focused teammate wants clear expectations and a recognition-focused employee needs public praise, the person who is motivated for power needs the chance to affect his destiny and the future of the company. When you speak to such people about a project, they need to know what they own and how that will give them greater responsibility next time.

The Damage $100 Can Do
An executive's tech team attends a trade show in Las Vegas every year to evangelize the firm's newest cameras. He thought it would really get the team members going to give the person who got the best reviews from their booth $100 to go gamble. The result: backlash. You'd think everyone would want the chance to earn an extra $100 in Vegas. One member of his team said: "This is our job. You don't have to bribe us to do our job." Motivated by achievement, not recognition or power, they take great pride in their work. The impression that their manager had so little faith in them caused the team to distrust his judgment.

Underpaid and Overworked
You want to motivate your overworked and underpaid employees. That sounds like a joke, but in every business model, there is a ground floor. You have teammates who are interns, volunteers, new, or in jobs that pay very little. You need them. Do you know where they are on the matrix? If not, you cannot motivate them.

If you're their direct manager, ask them three questions. Start with, "What do you love to do?" That still sounds like a joke, but it's not. You cannot motivate people if you don't know them. Some of the best work experiences can pay little or no money. Because the relationships are so strong, the experience is priceless. This first question gets at what the person likes and gives you clues about his core motivations.

Next ask, "What do you love about your career?" You don't ask him about his job because a job is something that you do for money. A career is something that you invest yourself in and want to do as a center of your life. The person may start talking about an entirely different job, and again, you're learning who he is and what he loves.

Last, ask, "What was the proudest moment of your life?" He may say, "When my son was born." Then you can go deeper with a question like, "What was it about being a parent that made you proud?" Now you will hear words that you can use to talk to him about what he is doing. In each question—and these are only examples of the type of questions that you can use to get to know someone—you reveal that you want to know who the person is. It's about finding what he values so that you can use language that shows that you value him.

Figure It Out with Context
Recognizing that there are specific categories of motivation usually reveals what each employee needs. If you cannot figure out where to place someone, however, look at the specific context where you work. Analyze the setting of what you want a person to do. How? Ask them what they want to see happen with a project, for the department, or for the company. Then listen.

Listen to how *they describe the future* and you'll know what they are motivated by, what pushes them: •

- *Ethos*. If they talk about the executives, other well-known competitors, and the biggest projects, they are motivated by ethos.
- *Emotion*. Their enthusiasm reveals whether they are motivated by emotion. If the question causes them to get jazzed or troubled, the emotion is a sign that feelings drive them.
- *Logic*. A conversation about the steps the company needs to take and why they are important shows you that the person is motivated by logic.

The same conversation can reveal what they are motivated for, what pulls them:

- *Achievement*. If their comments center around specific tasks, they are motivated by achievement.
- *Recognition*. If they talk about being seen as the best or winning awards, they are motivated for recognition.
- *Power*. If they talk about dominating the competition, wanting to run the group, or running things a particular way, power is the motivator.

Excerpted from *[Mastering Communication at Work, Second Edition: How to Lead, Manage, and Influence](#)* by Ethan F. Becker, Jon Wortmann

Paraphrase When Communicating and Coaching Others

By [Laura Mathis](#), Executive Communication Coach

Paraphrasing involves restating someone's message in your own words to confirm understanding. It is a powerful approach to furthering the understanding of the other person and yourself and can significantly increase the impact of another's comments.

As coaches, we know paraphrasing is incredibly difficult because we often need to listen deeply, a skill you must purposefully cultivate. Despite appearing attentive, our minds churn with thoughts, beliefs, defenses, distractions, and redirections.

The best way to practice paraphrasing is in your personal life. You can apply this powerful skill at work once you get the practice in with your husband, wife, kids, cousins, or friends.

When paraphrasing:

- Focus your paraphrase on what the other person meant rather than what you wish they meant. For example, avoid saying, "So you're saying you have NO homework?

Instead, say, "If I understand correctly, you finished all your schoolwork during study hall?"

- Put the focus of the paraphrase on the other person, e.g., if the person said, "I had a horrible night; I didn't sleep more than four hours," then don't paraphrase, "Well, I WISH I got four hours; I had an even worse sleep; I was up all night." Instead, say, "Oh no, you only had four hours of sleep?"
- Put the ownership of the paraphrase on yourself, e.g., "If I'm hearing you right…" or "If I understand you correctly…"
- Put the ownership of the other person's words on them, e.g., say, "If I understand you right, you're saying that…" or "Do you believe that…" or "Do you feel that…"

In your paraphrase, use some of the other person's words. For example, if the other person said, "I think we should do more fun outings as a family. We never go anywhere," You might paraphrase, "If I'm hearing you right, you feel like we need to schedule more outings we can enjoy together as a family?"

Don't judge or evaluate the other person's comments, e.g., don't say, "Don't you think you should be calmer when we drive in rush-hour traffic?"

You can use a paraphrase to validate your impression of the other's comments; e.g., you could say, "So you were frustrated when…?"

The paraphrase should be shorter than the original comments made by the other person. Be brief and concise. It's not about you!

Think Mind Over Mouth

By [Laurie Schloff](#), Executive Communication Coach

The ability to convey ideas with a significant impact is highly associated with career and organizational success.

Yet, technology leaders and professionals face a major challenge; simplifying complex and technical information so that others "get it", buy-in, and take action for the best results. Here are some truths about transmitting knowledge and influencing others outside your field:

Knowing your topic does not equal speaking clearly about your topic.

Your listeners likely don't care about your topic as much as you do—sorry!
Anytime you speak, whether one-on-one or to a crowd, in person or virtual, in a formal or informal setting, you are a "presenter".

Preparation, Not Desperation: Strategize and plan, no matter how knowledgeable you are.

Let's look at key strategies for thinking and speaking "mind over mouth".

- **Develop communication empathy**

As experts in your field, your knowledge, breadth and depth, mastery of the big picture, AND the details are valued.
Don't be heartbroken to learn that your audience doesn't **care to hear it all...**especially some of those technical specifics.

Approach your meeting with a listener-centered mental mindset, what I call **communication empathy.**

Let's consider questions to develop your communication empathy:

1. What are the **top three points** these listeners care about?

A CTO I worked with bored his board when he went into passionate detail, complete with sixteen spreadsheets about a system upgrade.

All the board needed was the benefit of the change, and of course, the cost!

2. What can I **omit** to focus and streamline? (And not feel like you are giving away your firstborn!)
If you're worried about leaving out something important, keep in mind that you can always troubleshoot questions you may be asked in advance, or follow up after the meeting if requested.

- **Check in with your listeners**

1. Communicate in advance.

The best communicators get comfortable with asking listeners what they'd like to cover *before* the meeting. Executives in a large healthcare company I'm working with shared this blunt advice: "Talk about what I want to hear. Just ask me and I'll tell you."

You may also want to consider consulting with a colleague who knows the listeners or conduct a needs assessment prior to a high-stakes presentation.

2. Consider listeners' level of knowledge about the topic.

If you're over their heads, the deal may be over as well. Jess, a biostatistician I prepped, lamented.

> "I messed up an investor presentation. I thought they were savvy about research, but they were confused by even basic terminology. Wish I knew that in advance."

We all know that she should have done her research before the meeting. Preparation, not desperation, Jess!

3. Stop to include your listeners.

Make sure you're meeting their needs *during* the presentation. No one hits the bullseye 100%. Make your key point at a meeting in 60 seconds or less, then volley to your listener(s). Become comfortable with questions like:

> *Anything you'd like to add or ask? Are we on target? Questions, comments?*

- **Master verbal organization**

Excellent speakers convey their message concisely, with fluency and focus.

Show me a great presenter in your field, and I bet you they have prepared, practiced and probably have a coach. One-half of one percent of the population is gifted verbally. The *rest* of us benefit from learning and mastering techniques.

1. Headline for impact:

Work to convey your key points in 15-25 words, what I call a *verbal headline.*

(That's actually a generous number of words, a newsletter or a slide headline is usually less than twelve words). Listeners value your ability to bring what they need or want to hear to the foreground. Devote time to figuring out what *matters* to your listeners and then create your headlines. Here's a strong, succinct headline a VP shared recently:

> *"We're innovating to improve complex care."*

Note that the wording is well chosen to streamline and tighten the thought.

2. Learn the HEC Model

The *HEC* model is popular with clients who present an idea, or who are on the spot at meetings.

HEC stands for **H**eadline—**E**xample—**C**omment

Headline followed by an *Example*, and then an ending *Comment* (opinion, perspective, action).

Practice HEC with this question:

> *What do you find most rewarding about your work?*

Here's a sample reply:

> **Headline:** *I enjoy creating and designing landing pages for individuals and groups.*
> **Example***: An investment firm asked my team to design*
> *a page for analysts preparing to present at a conference.*
> **Comment:** *Not knowing what's around the corner, and always having a fresh project at hand keeps me busy and energized*.

3. Make new ideas or terminology easy to understand.

Listeners are uncomfortable when they don't know a term, abbreviation, or concept you are sharing. It's crucial to scan your words and be sure to explain and simplify what isn't familiar or clear. This sequence will help:

> *State the term, Define the term briefly, then offer an example.*

Try it out with a word or idea that listeners outside your field find challenging. Let's give it a try with the words "fast pacing".

> **Term:** Watch out for *fast pacing* with non-technical listeners.
> **Definition:** Fast pacing means you are including too much material in the time you have.
> **Example:** A speaker who is too fast-paced will lose their listeners at point one, while they are already on to point five.

Keep these tips about concise organization, defining terminology, and sensitivity to your listeners' needs in mind for your next meeting.

You will be on your way to speaking for success!

Hate Speech in the Workplace

By Dr. Dennis Becker, Founder and Senior Coaching Partner

Hate speech can hurt your employees… and your bottom line.

It's almost certain that people in any organization—including your team—are hearing, reading, and discussing these issues both inside and outside the workplace. And, unfortunately, some may be engaging in it.

You should have a plan *for a proper response* **BEFORE** *it shows up* **in the workplace.**

Many managers need practical, actionable advice on how they can best respond to the situation and communicate with employees who may have been affected. Download our 11-page document and get helpful, practical guidance on:

- Hate speech vs. free speech
- When to act
- Two ways to respond
- Recognizing hate speech
- When you don't hear the hate speech directly
- When the hate-speaker is in a position above you

ChatGPT: When Your Technical Skills Are Eclipsed, Your Humanity Will Matter More Than Ever

By Monica Murphy, Senior Coaching Partner

That's the title of an insightful New York Times article by Aneesh Raman and Maria Flynn, which states "AI could usher in a world of work that is anchored more, not less, around human ability." As speech coaches, we can only respond with "Whew!"

Fascinated, we turned to AI and asked ChatGPT to summarize it. Here's what we got:

The article discusses a significant shift in the skills valued in the economy, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence. While technical skills have been highly sought after, they are increasingly susceptible to automation by AI On the other hand, "soft skills" such as communication, empathy, and critical thinking are becoming more crucial and durable in the workforce.

It highlights the need to rethink workforce training, moving away from an overemphasis on technical skills like coding and data analysis. Despite the current focus on technical education due to its perceived competitiveness in the job market, there's a growing realization of the importance of human-centric skills.

The emergence of generative AI is expected to impact various professions, potentially affecting all types of work to some extent. As AI takes over routine tasks, it's predicted that future job roles will focus more on collaboration and communication, emphasizing people skills.

The article emphasizes the need to recognize and prioritize human capabilities in the age of AI, rather than succumbing to fears about job displacement. It stresses the importance of people skills in effectively working with AI systems and underlines the demand for such skills across industries.

Leaders across sectors are urged to develop new educational approaches that align with the evolving demands of the economy, placing equal importance on training in people skills alongside technical skills. This involves reevaluating the prioritization of science and engineering over humanities in education.

Employers are encouraged to invest in educating employees not only in AI tools but also in people skills and interpersonal collaboration. The shift towards valuing human potential alongside AI could lead to increased equity in the workforce and broader societal benefits.

Ultimately, the article suggests that the future economy will be characterized by a "relationship economy," where people skills and social abilities are paramount. This shift calls for a reimagining of what is possible for humans, both individually and collectively, and underscores the importance of investing in and valuing human capabilities.

As speech coaches, we work on refining these tools. It's about creating muscle memory and a good coach can help you build that.

You can find the article here: https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/14/opinion/ai-economy-jobs-colleges.html

The Unique Challenges of Neurodiverse Communication in the Workplace

By [Laura Mathis](#), Executive Communication Coach

As an Executive Communication Coach, I'm thrilled to see **Neurodiversity** becoming more recognized and celebrated at work. However, its nuances in the workplace can cause frustration and miscommunications.

For example, if you work with someone who rarely makes eye contact, you might assume they are shy, nervous, or uncomfortable. Using eye contact is an essential nonverbal communication behavior that most of us use automatically in work interactions. Eye contact helps people communicate their interest and attention to a conversation. **Yet, making eye contact with others can be very challenging for some people with autism.** There are many books and articles written by adults with autism who describe the stress they felt when well-meaning bosses and managers tried to force them to make eye contact during conversations, client meetings, or presentations. In many cases, they describe being further distracted and unable to focus on the conversation because of this insistence.

Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and

behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits. Still, it is often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities.

Here are a few additional definitions for clarity:

Neurotypical is an informal term describing a person whose brain functions are considered usual or expected by society. This term is often applied to people who do not have a developmental disorder like autism, differentiating them from those who do. It is neither a mental disorder nor even an official diagnostic term.

Neurodivergent describes someone who isn't neurotypical, and **neurodiverse** generally refers to differences in brain function among people diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These words can be applied to other neurodevelopmental conditions like dyslexia or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

There are many forms that Neurodiversity can take, but for this article, I'll speak specifically about the autism spectrum.

I've had the opportunity to coach professionals who identify on the autism spectrum and also have a close family member on the spectrum, so I have no shortage of practice when it comes to noticing the small micro-communications that are often lost or misperceived. I do not claim mastery but merely the complex process of listening and communicating with clarity, patience, and an open mind.

You may wonder if you currently work with someone on the autism spectrum, or perhaps someone has told you specifically that they are autistic. **Either way, how we communicate needs to be looked at with flexibility and deeper understanding.**

If you consider yourself Neurotypical, consider the workplace examples below. You'll see a few ways a neurotypical person might communicate with someone on the autism spectrum (let's call this person with ASD your "colleague."). Observe below how messages and information can get crossed:

You don't get any eye contact from your colleague when speaking with them, and it feels like they aren't listening.

After a long conversation, your colleague didn't speak much and only said "Okay" and then walked away, but you aren't sure if they understood.

After an excellent co-presentation with your colleague, you raise your hand to high-five, but they walk back to their desk right past you.

In the elevator, you ask your colleague how their weekend was, and they say "Fine" and don't ask you back.

You pull a piece of fluff off your colleague's coat, and they jump away and recoil from you.

Your colleague is the only one who never joins the team for happy hour on Fridays.

You run weekly stand-up meetings where everyone shares their work progress, but your colleague only sends theirs via Slack.

What do you think of these examples?

It might be tempting to diagnose this colleague as…. a JERK!

And maybe that's true?

In that case, we might be brought in as [coaches](#) to help this person come across better in terms of their communication style and approach to relationship building.

But…

It could ALSO be that your colleague is on the autism spectrum, which means they may function differently than you when it comes to understanding nonverbal cues, processing verbal information, expressing emotions and thoughts, managing sensitivities to food or sounds, physical touch, social gatherings, knowing how to engage in small talk, and much more.

There is no quick and easy solution to creating harmonious relationships at work with a neurodiverse colleague. **One place to start is recognizing the need for deep understanding and tailored approaches.** Acknowledging and addressing distinct differences can lead to a more harmonious and supportive workplace where everyone feels heard, respected, and appreciated.

Struggling to Get to the Point? Try the HEC Strategy!

By [Dr. Chas Womelsdorf](#), Executive Communication Coach

Have you ever been asked to "get to the point" and found yourself scrambling? If so, you might be an inductive thinker—someone who starts with smaller details and builds toward the bigger picture. While this approach feels natural for many, it can waste time and frustrate deductive thinkers, who prefer starting with the conclusion.

Enter the HEC strategy: **Headline-Example-Comment.** This simple framework helps you speak clearly and efficiently in 20 seconds or less.

1. **Headline**
Start with your main point or the most attention-grabbing idea.

Example: "Hey Paul, having an official agenda could make our meetings shorter and more productive."

2. **Example**
Follow up with a supporting detail.

Example: "For instance, if I know something I care about is coming up on the agenda, I can stay focused and avoid interrupting with questions that'll be addressed later."

3. **Comment**
Wrap up with your opinion or a suggested action.

Example: "Let's try sending an agenda out a couple of hours before our next meeting. I'm happy to help create it if that'll make things easier."

By using HEC, you'll communicate more effectively, saving time and earning the respect of your deductive-thinking peers.

Preventing Interruptions

By [Melody Elkin](#), Executive Communication Coach

Preventing interruptions begins by taking a closer look at the way you communicate your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Starting with your main point ensures listeners hear your key insights before interruptions.

Learn how in this [one-minute video.](#)

Does Virtual Presenting Level the Speaking Field?

By [Kristen Curran-Faller](), COO, Senior Coaching Partner

Recently, I worked with a client who shared with me that her nervousness associated with public speaking was not as much of a problem since the world went virtual. I was curious about what changed for her or what had helped her.

When working with clients on controlling their nervousness, there are many things to be considered. Our primary focus is on managing thoughts. The thoughts are what people say to themselves before, during, and after the presentation. We all talk to ourselves. It's what we say that has a tremendous impact on how well we can control nervousness.

She said, "Kristen, we are all equal now. Everyone is in the same size box. No one takes up more space than anyone else on the screen."

Hearing this brought a smile to my face. This client has successfully changed her thoughts to be more positive and productive. So whether or not you believe that virtual presenting levels the speaking field, the more important takeaway is that changing the way you think about something and internalize it helps create a more positive outcome.

Projecting Executive Presence Online—Recorded Lesson
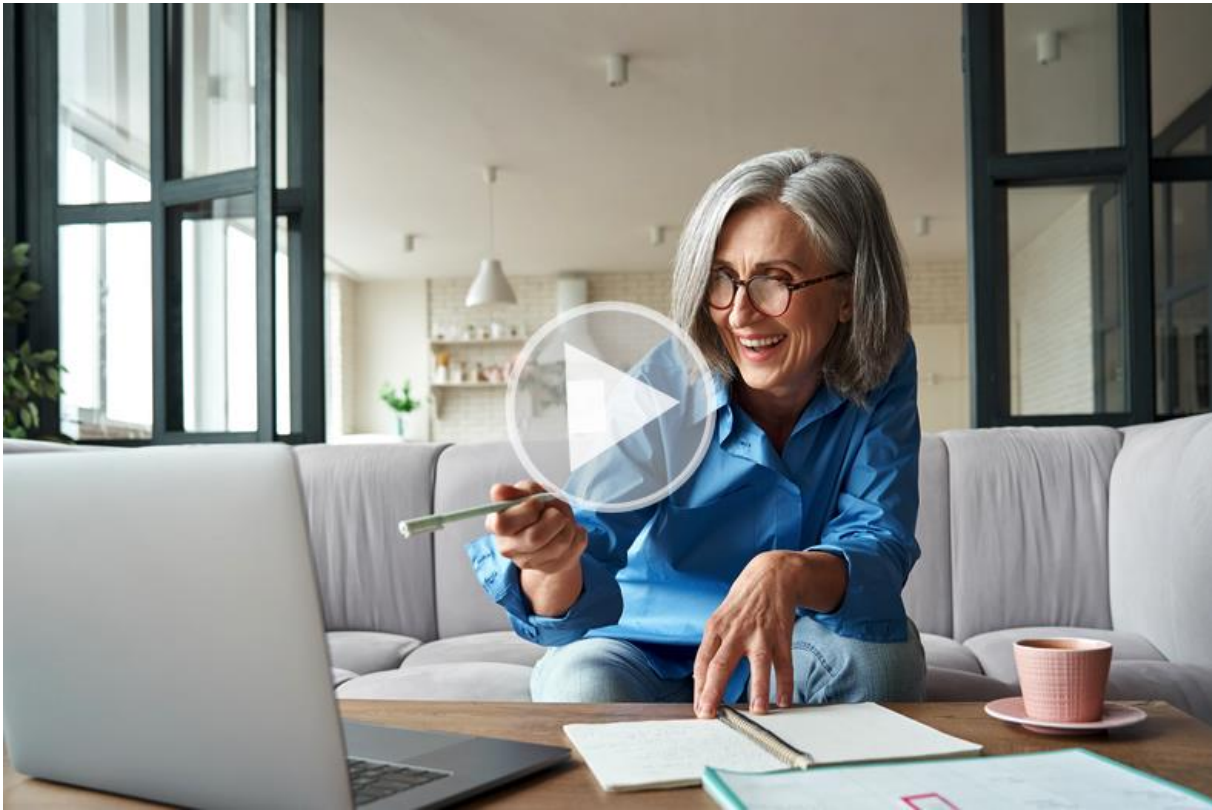
Leading requires a lot of skill and effort. In today's remote work environment, it requires even more. We know what is effective, required, and preferred in leaders who are leading remotely.

This 30-minute complimentary lesson provides a clear picture of the skills you need to be an effective leader in our remote business world.

Join Monica Murphy, Senior Coaching Partner, and Dr. Ethan Becker, President, and learn how to "lead from the shoulders up."

WATCH NOW

Cross-Cultural Conversations: Why We Misunderstand Each Other

By [Dr. Ethan Becker](#), President

The topic of misunderstanding has many angles to discuss; it's hard to pick one — tone, choice of words, inflection, context, etc.

Let's look at teams that have members from other cultures. Now, remember, each group has its own culture, so when you see me use the word culture, it does not only mean different countries; it might mean other departments. For this discussion, I'll focus on the word idiom.

Definition

> *an expression in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either in having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements (such as up in the air for "undecided") or in its grammatically atypical use of words (such as give way)* – **Source: Merriam-Webster**

While this may all sound like a foreign language to you, are we indeed that different in today's modern world? Has the world changed that much? I like the topic of idioms because it's how many Americans and other cultures communicate. Without awareness, it

can be highly confusing for individuals learning English as a second language or those visiting an American culture.

A less formal explanation is that an idiom is a collection of words that together convey a specific meaning, but if you look at each word, they have very different uses.

Examples

These are just a few. As professional speech coaches, we train teams on cross-cultural communication often. During training sessions, we want participants to learn that what makes sense to them may not make sense to someone else. The other person might understand each word, but the collection of words together may have a different meaning. They should be aware of what they are saying, how they are saying it, and confirm their complete understanding.

Imagine your daily conversations at work. How fast do you talk? How much information do you cover during a meeting? You see, your listeners nod and smile. Your talk makes great sense (to you). They express visual responses of understanding when, in reality, they have no clue what you're saying. Then, you are surprised when the project comes out differently than expected.

Great communicators make an effort to maximize understanding. Perfect? No. But we can improve communication by recognizing ingrained idioms. The sounds and words we use to communicate our thoughts can make perfect sense to us, but do they make sense to our listeners? If you use an idiom, try explaining it or consider how your listeners will or will not understand it. Give it some thought, and see how being more careful when communicating with people from other cultures does improve communication.

Delivering Performance Reviews Confidently—Recorded Lesson

If your work situation requires you to manage other people, this complimentary, 30-minute lesson will benefit you. One of your responsibilities is to periodically give people an assessment of how they perform their work responsibilities. This is often a sensitive and uncomfortable task.

In this 30-minute recorded lesson, Dr. Ethan Becker, President, and Dr. Dennis Becker, Founder and Senior Coaching Partner, focus on delivering a review and a specific format that will produce a positive attitude and more productive work behaviors

WATCH NOW

Tips for Leading Effective Meetings

By [Laurie Schloff,](#) Executive Communication Coach

Our coaching team appreciates the challenge of masterminding the right mix of talent, personalities, and action items.

Fortunately, easy tweaks make a significant impact to enhance comfort, participation, and awareness of nuances in a team member's behavior.

Recently, I worked with a senior leader in financial services who felt it was his responsibility to control the agenda and results of *all* meetings; in fact, he considered it part of his job. He was baffled that his group was quiet, rarely initiated topics, didn't show passion regarding action items, and only engaged in small talk *after* the meeting.

He asked me how he could change the situation. Our team of communication experts developed easy-to-apply key strategies to help this and other clients develop more productive teams.

We advised:

1. Begin meetings with small talk or each person sharing an observation or personal update to develop trust and increase interpersonal communication.

2. Develop an agenda to which team members are expected to contribute. Research indicates that 1/3 of all meetings are viewed as a waste of time. Change that!

3. Use meetings for discussion and problem-solving rather than just providing information. One of my favorite sayings is, "Go from 'information to *inspiration and impact.'"*

4. Try an approach like "round robin" or going around the room when possible. The goal is to keep the talkers from dominating and allow quiet people to contribute more. This is essential for equalizing talking time, a key ingredient for team success.

5. Have some fun and novelty with a bit of partying, such as lunch meetings outside the office and/or appealing surprise guests. Refreshments always help. I had a client who wanted to tighten his budget by eliminating the snacks. I told him I'd give him the 25 bucks for goodies to save all the gains we'd made in coaching.

Try out these suggestions, and your team meetings will be more engaging, valuable, and productive!

Defensiveness Prevents Clear Communication

By [Dr. Ethan Becker](#), President

The First Moment: Defensiveness

If your listener is defensive, your point is probably lost. They have been left with the impression that you, intentionally or not, are criticizing their idea or them. Instead of focusing on getting solutions, they will be driven by this passion for defending the idea or their persona. They are struggling, and it may be your fault. You may have needed to set the right expectations; your tone may have needed to be more appropriate for the message you were trying to convey; you may not have provided them with the necessary resources to accomplish their goals, or they could just be worn out. If you take advantage of their defensiveness, it will only get worse. If you understand how to handle their defensiveness, you can rapidly shift their negative energy—whether fear, doubt, or worry— and help them leave the conversation with your message.

Avoiding the Trap

They say, "No." You say, "Yes." They say, "I didn't know." You say, "You should have." Perhaps you were taught to ask questions to manage effectively, so you say, "How could you not know?" But, the presupposition in this question suggests that they are somehow not smart because they did not know. While that may not be your intended message, it's there, their spine will rise, and their eyes will narrow. If you react to their posturing instead

of listening and assisting them to sit back and reflect on what's bothering them, they will also react rather than focus on the real purpose of your conversation.

If you are in a conversation and you notice someone getting defensive, stop. Do not go any further with your point, as attempting to argue your idea differently rarely works; they won't listen when defensive. They have one agenda: to deflect whatever they think you are attacking. You may need to just listen, ask a question, or make a statement like "What do you need?" or "Help me understand your point of view." You may have to continue the conversation at another time. The fact that you take time to process and digest that conversation is validation, and that's the first step to overcoming their defensiveness.

If you do not plan how you'll approach their emotion, rigid beliefs, or confusion ahead, they will stay shut down and retreat deeper into themselves. To help them come to a decision or understand your point of view without feeling defensive, use a format called "Defensive Persuasion."

The Format: Defensive Persuasion

1. Validate. If they are going to be comfortable, they must know you value whatever issue is causing their defensiveness or their opinion—even if you disagree. Choose your mode of validation; will it be a head nod, listening, or paraphrasing? They cannot open their minds until they know you have heard and understood their point—especially when you disagree entirely. Even in established relationships, you will need to validate the other person. Not as often, but if they are fired up, the only way to cool them down is to show them you recognize their view or the value of their contribution.
2. Frame. What message are you trying to communicate to them? You have to decide this ahead of time, and that's why if you run into someone who is defensive and cannot figure out why and they won't tell you, you have to pause the conversation. If you don't' know the message you want them to understand, the conversation will still go in circles, and they will stay defensive.
3. Decide your timeline. It can take several conversations to overcome their emotion. Before stating what you want from the other person, you may need to validate for two or three conversations. If you do this correctly, the trust you build will enable you to communicate more easily next time.

Best Practices in Communication for Managers—Recorded Lesson

This recording is designed for those who are either new to the role and responsibilities of management or those who are experienced but looking to review a manager's most important duties and expectations. Dr. Dennis Becker, Founder and Senior Coaching Partner and Dr. Ian Turnipseed, Executive Communication Coach, will teach you how to navigate essential conversations utilizing the five critical skills needed to be an effective manager of people

Give Me a Break! Tips to Promote Team Morale and Sanity

By [Laura Mathis](#), Executive Communication Coach

As remote work evolves, we find that clients frequently express concerns about virtual meetings.

So, meeting leaders, here are easy ways to enhance your team's morale and productivity :

1. **Give them a break**. Some team members feel like it's a luxury to visit their own bathroom or grab a yogurt, as close as they may be. Encourage 15-minute breaks every ninety minutes or two hours and discourage back-to-back meetings. Speaking of meetings…
2. **Make it easy to ask questions**. Team members miss informal chatter, laughs, and learning from others just by hanging out. One financial analyst shared that he avoids asking his manager a simple question since it seems "so formal" to schedule a call.
3. **Remember that fun builds trust.** Make time for rituals and some crazy moments. Getting those positive hormones going is bonding—and bonding builds morale. Back in November, I asked a bank CIO to share the highlight of his past week. The enthusiasm in his voice and body language was better than ever when he shared that he organized a Halloween costume contest. This C- Suite Dracula had forty team members enter with just a day's notice.

4. **Create an inclusive meeting mindset.** McKinsey, the top consulting firm, recently reported engagement and performance correlated with how "included" an employee feels: https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/understanding-organizational-barriers-to-a-more-inclusive-workplace

I'm currently helping meeting leaders/facilitators to ensure that participation is as equal as possible, that leaders aren't doing all the talking and that even the quieter folks are adding value.

Try a few easy tweaks, such as doing a "round-robin" after a question is posed to the whole group.

One of my favorite quotes: "Everyone is wearing a sign—make me feel special."

Management Communication: Digital, Telephone, or Face-to-Face?

By Dr. Dennis Becker, Founder and Senior Coaching Partner

I was recently told, "You're not going to believe this, but one of my friends was just let go for laying off her employees by email."

Imagine how her colleagues felt receiving their termination notices via email: unappreciated, disposable, and confused. An email disaster like this may sound unusual, but I regularly hear similar stories in the business world.

Over the past decade, email and text messages have become increasingly important forms of communication in the workplace. In 2023, global email traffic was estimated at 347 billion messages per day.

As a communication coach/consultant, people often ask me how these digital channels can be used effectively to lead, manage, and communicate in the workplace. My overarching advice is three-fold:

1. Identify the communication channels available at your disposal as a leader/communicator
2. Use each option wisely and in an acceptable way for the message you need to convey and target your audience
3. Follow basic guidelines to model and reinforce professional email etiquette within your work environment

Effective leaders understand the advantages and the differences between the three main elements of workplace communication: digital (email & text), telephone, and face-to-face/interpersonal communication. They utilize each aspect depending upon the type of message that needs to be delivered and an analysis of the intended recipient(s) needs, bias, knowledge, and anticipated reaction.

A competent leader, for instance, would never use email to communicate a difficult or confrontational message, where tone and intention can be easily misinterpreted, causing great hardship for all parties involved. Instead, a good leader understands that it's best to convey uncomfortable messages in person, where clear, two-way dialogue, thorough explanations, and opportunities for questions and answers can promote a "meeting of the minds" (or at least a basic understanding from the recipient of what needs to be improved). This approach is especially pertinent to those recipients who tend to be overly sensitive or defensive.

Am I suggesting that leaders avoid using digital channels? Impossible! Besides the fact that it would be unrealistic in today's work environment, email and text (especially with the growth of Slack and other popular apps) offer many distinct advantages over other forms of communication in the workplace when used correctly. Email is quick and efficient (eliminates "phone tag") and is a cost-effective option for conversing with colleagues off-site. Also, there is no better tool for sending documents or communicating the exact basic message to many recipients simultaneously.

However, the increase in email communication in the workplace brings with it the need for a better understanding and practice of professional email etiquette. In addition, while some may view email as casual and treat it as such, I always remind my clients that their emails reflect their professionalism (or lack thereof) and set the tone for how they gain respect, establish trust, and manage effectively.

Now more than ever, digital communication is changing the dynamics of how we engage in the business world. I have found that this type of communication is most efficient and effective when everyone in the same workplace agrees to some "rules of the road," such as "Who do I need to cc?" or "What needs to be in the subject line?" or "When is it appropriate to forward?" To achieve this goal, I strongly encourage businesses to adopt, educate, and reinforce professional email etiquette. The result will be clearer and more efficient electronic communication that increases productivity and camaraderie across the entire organization.

Maintaining Online Relationships—Recorded Lesson

Everyone has relationships. Whether those relationships are pleasant and productive is based on two distinct factors. In this complimentary lesson Dr. Ian Turnipseed, Executive Communication Coach, and Dr. Dennis Becker, Founder and Senior Coaching Partner, will share the research that gave us this knowledge and how to implement it in your life.

Watch our 30-minute recorded lesson and you will learn:

- To understand the needs of your listeners
- Practical tools to implement in building relationships
- The Human Business Model.

Enhance your communication skills with proven strategies that you can immediately apply to keep remote employees and teams focused and productive.

About Us

Since 1964, the professional Speech Coaches at The Speech Improvement Company have touched more than a million people around the world. We are a women-owned business and are the oldest speech coaching firm in the United States.

We support an international clientele including Fortune 500 executives, business professionals, politicians, professional athletes, entrepreneurs, and private individuals to strengthen their communication skills. We work with leaders of countries, companies, and people throughout organizations. Our coaches are formally educated at the graduate level or beyond in all aspects of human communication and cultural understanding. We have both the educational background and the real-world experience to identify speaker strengths, uncover areas of need, and evoke behavioral change.

To date, we have written 13 books on communication and are published in five languages. We have instructed at Harvard University, MIT, and other world-class institutions as well as conducting pro bono work for non-profit and community organizations. Our coaching team attends monthly development days to ensure they are apprised of the latest research, theory, tools, and trends related to human communication.

What Topics We Cover

Our focus is on helping clients strengthen communication skills for application in both business and personal settings. While each client interaction is unique, our most popular areas of focus are in the following 5 areas:

- Leadership & Management
- Public Speaking
- Sales Communications
- Customer Service Excellence
- Accent Modification

Our Clients

We've delivered group workshops and one-on-one executive coaching to thousands of clients from the world's largest pharmaceutical firms to mid-sized retailers, to small manufacturers and tech startups. They all share one challenge: the need to speak clearly, persuasively, and with confidence in any setting. Some of our well-known clients include:

Pfizer	Reebok	Mass General Hospital
Goldman Sachs	Kaiser Permanente	Bank of America
Apple	The Nielsen Company	Takeda
Bose Corporation	McKinsey & Company	The Boston Red Sox