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Communication Essentials

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Learn to:

- Master the art of communication
- Establish rapport with ease
- Negotiate with confidence
- Communicate effectively with modern technology

Elizabeth Kuhnke

*Author of Body Language
For Dummies and Persuasion &
Influence For Dummies*



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Communication Essentials For Dummies®

Published by
Wiley Publishing Australia Pty Ltd
42 McDougall Street
Milton, Qld 4064
www.dummies.com

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Authorised adaptation of *Communication Skills For Dummies* © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
(9781118401248).

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Author: Kuhnke, Elizabeth, author.
Title: Communication Essentials For Dummies / Elizabeth Kuhnke
ISBN: 9780730319511 (pbk.)
9780730319528 (ebook)
Series: For Dummies.
Notes: Includes index.
Subjects: Business communication.
Communication in organisations.
Communication in management.
Communication and technology.
Interpersonal communication.

Dewey Number: 658.45

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Cover image: © iStock.com/NCHANT

Typeset by diacriTech, Chennai, India

Printed in Singapore by
C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

Make no mistake: Your ability to communicate with clarity, courage and commitment is your number one key to success at work and in your personal life. No matter how innovative your ideas, how sincere your feelings or how passionate your beliefs, if you fail to connect with other people and communicate in a way that persuades, inspires or motivates them, your efforts are going to be in vain.

You're never not communicating. Whether you're in a deep sleep, in a heated debate with a colleague or in a text-a-thon with a friend, in today's world of 24/7 communication you're always sending and receiving messages. Some people are outstanding communicators, listening for understanding in addition to conveying their own clear intentions, whereas others struggle to connect with their own message and with other people.

Great communication leads to understanding, intimacy and mutual appreciation. The good news is that you can develop and successfully apply communication skills, as long as you're willing to commit to the process and practise. As my father used to say, communication works for those who work at it.

When you're delivering a message, make sure that your intention is clear and your delivery is consistent with your message. Your aim is to connect with the people you're engaging with in order to achieve mutually satisfying goals and objectives.

About This Book

As an American, married to a German, living in England and working with multicultural teams and individuals around the globe, I'm very aware of the influence of culture — including gender, race and nationality — on communication. Although I devote one chapter specifically to communicating across cultures, my primary focus in this book is on Western communication practices. I've been selective in

what I've chosen to include, with my aim being to offer you ways of communicating to enhance your personal and business relationships.

I explain how your attitude impacts on the content and delivery of your message. I describe how treating others with respect and establishing rapport increases your chances of creating clear and compelling communication. I show you how you can develop productive, profitable and positive relationships by listening with an open mind, being certain about the messages you want to convey and being prepared for challenging interactions. When you support the message you convey through words with body language and voice, you increase your chances of communicating successfully.

Whether you're writing your message, speaking face-to-face or using the various forms of communication technology, this book encourages you to listen to what others have to say, treat everyone with respect, maintain a clear intention about what you want to express and convey your message in a way the receiver can understand.

Foolish Assumptions

Although making assumptions can lead to misunderstandings, I set out mine here for clarity. In this book I assume that you:

- ✔ Are interested in communication skills and want to know a bit about the subject.
- ✔ Want to improve the way you communicate at work.
- ✔ Are willing to reflect on what you read and put into practice the suggestions I offer.
- ✔ Expect the best of yourself and others.

Icons Used in This Book

For sharpening your thinking and focusing your attention, I use the following icons in the pages' margins:



This icon highlights relevant stories about family members, friends, clients, colleagues or just people I've observed. I hope they entertain and enlighten you about the joys and sorrows inherent in communication.



Here's a chance for you to view communication from a business perspective. By putting communication into a business context I help you see where you can keep doing what you're doing or perhaps make a few helpful changes.



This symbol underscores a valuable point to keep in mind.



This icon indicates practical and immediate remedies for honing your communication skills.



Here you can have a go at putting theory into practice. I've designed these exercises to enhance your skills and turn you into a first-rate communicator.



Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, but if you take note of the common errors that I place beside this icon you can steer clear of the worst. Other people have made these mistakes so that you don't need to!

Where to Go from Here

Each chapter of this book addresses a specific aspect of communication, from improving your listening skills to communicating efficiently through technology, from appreciating different styles of communicating to establishing how to reach your communication goals.

Although I've designed all the information within these covers to support you in being a top-flight communicator, not everything is going to be pertinent to your specific requirements or interests. So you can read this book in any order that pleases you and in your own time: What, when and where you want.

If you're interested in dealing with particular tricky situations and behaviour, turn to Chapter 8. To discover the important impact of your attitude on communication, have a look at Chapter 6. If communicating across cultures concerns you, flip to Chapter 10.

So kick off your shoes, sit back and prepare to pick up a few tips and techniques for becoming the superb communicator you deserve to be. I sincerely hope that you enjoy the journey and benefit from reading this book.



Five Tips for Speaking Face-to-Face

- ✓ **Engage with your eyes.** Your eyes reveal your thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. Where you look when you're speaking and listening reveals how you feel about the subject or person you're engaging with.
- ✓ **Speak clearly.** If you want your listener to understand what you're saying, know what you want to say before you open your mouth. Then, when you're clear about what you want to say, make sure that you can be understood.
- ✓ **Listen with willingness.** Whether at work or at home, listening with the desire to understand is critical to effective communication.
- ✓ **Relay what you hear.** When you demonstrate that you've heard what people have said and mean, they're willing to walk across hot coals for you. Restating or paraphrasing what you hear shows that you grasp their picture and get their message.
- ✓ **Pay attention to body language.** Hesitant movements, hunched shoulders and a drooping head indicate subservience, doubt and insecurity whereas touching, expansive gestures and a radiant smile indicate dominance and say 'I'm in control.'



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Chapter 1

Looking at the Finer Points of Great Communication

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Communicating with your whole self
 - ▶ Seeking clarity at all times
 - ▶ Treating other people with respect
 - ▶ Dealing with awkward situations
-

You're always communicating. Whether you're dozing by the fireplace on a chilly winter night, praising your children for their successes at school or admonishing an employee for showing up late for work — you're continuously sending out messages through your words, voice and body.

Sometimes your communications are crystal clear, such as when your eyes are sparkling, your mouth is in a full-blown smile and you're holding your arms out wide ready to embrace a returning loved one. But at other times you can convey an unintended message, such as appearing sad, angry or despondent when in fact you're simply considering how to respond to a challenging situation. As a result, taking a level of control about how and what you communicate is vitally important in your personal and business lives.

In this chapter you discover the fundamental points for communicating like a pro, which involve using more than just your mouth and the words you say. I guide you through preparing yourself mentally for conveying your messages clearly and connecting with others who have different points of view from yours. You also have a quick glance into the value of treating other people with respect and taking the time to listen to what someone else has to say before coming in with your opinion. In addition, I provide a series of steps for handling difficult situations.

Using Your Whole Body to Communicate

Great communicators aim to understand others before making themselves understood. They grasp not only what people are saying through their spoken words, but also recognise what others (and themselves) convey through body language, emotional responses and vocal quality.

If you take one message from this book (and I hope you find many, many more!), remember that conveying information involves all aspects of your personality, your mind, your eyes and ears as well as your mouth and facial expressions, and how you stand, gesture and move your entire body.

Getting into the right frame of mind

By getting into the right frame of mind I mean ensuring that you have a good attitude, and so let go of negative thoughts and beliefs that serve as barriers to accomplished communication. Ditch judgement and blame and think about how you want the conversation to proceed. (In Chapter 6 you find suggestions for checking your attitude.)

Negative thoughts and beliefs that may hamper communication include:

- ✔ Finding fault with the other person
- ✔ Disparaging other people's ideas
- ✔ Belittling individuals' beliefs
- ✔ Ridiculing someone else's point of view



Knowing what you want to achieve and being open to hearing what the other person has to say are the foundations for great communication. If the old saying 'energy follows thought' is true, whatever you focus on achieving in a conversation is what you can achieve.

When you approach communication free of murky thoughts, you can let your linguistic wizardry steer you towards free and open relationships.