COMMUNICATION

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A Complete, How-to Guide to Help You:

Connect With and Influence Your Audience

Become a Think-On-Your-Feet Trainer

Present With Authority and Listen Effectively

✧ ASTD Press

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About the
Training Basics Series

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ASTD's *Training Basics* series recognizes and, in some ways, celebrates the fast-paced, ever-changing reality of organizations today. Jobs, roles, and expectations change quickly. One day you might be a network administrator or a process line manager, and the next day you might be asked to train 50 employees in basic computer skills or to instruct line workers in quality processes.

Where do you turn for help? The ASTD *Training Basics* series is designed to be your one-stop solution. The series takes a minimalist approach to your learning curve dilemma and presents only the information you need to be successful. Each book in the series guides you through key aspects of training: giving presentations, making the transition to the role of trainer, designing and delivering training, and evaluating training. The books in the series also include some advanced skills such as performance and basic business proficiencies.

The ASTD *Training Basics* series is the perfect tool for training and performance professionals looking for easy-to-understand materials that will prepare non-trainers to take on a training role. In addition, this series is the perfect reference tool for any trainer's bookshelf and a quick way to hone your existing skills. The titles currently planned for the series include:

- ▶ *Presentation Basics* (2003)
- ▶ *Trainer Basics* (2003)
- ▶ *Training Design Basics* (2003)
- ▶ *Facilitation Basics* (2004)
- ▶ *Communication Basics* (2004)
- ▶ *Performance Basics* (2004)
- ▶ *Evaluation Basics* (2005)
- ▶ *Needs Assessment Basics* (2005).

Preface

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Communication is as old as the hills and as fresh as your next conversation. It's the way humans define their unique way of connecting, as in, "We are really communicating!" or conversely, "I absolutely cannot communicate with that person!" The act (or the art) of human communication is so all-encompassing that a book about communication skills is a bit daunting. In fact, the topic itself usually consumes at least one entire aisle at any large book store . . . if not more.

For that reason, this book—*Communication Basics*—does not purport to be the final word on communication skills. Instead, we (the authors) are trying to give you (the trainer) a head start on the skills that we have learned and hope will help you listen to the participants and really hear them . . . or talk with the participants and be truly understood. To that end, we give you many techniques to try and steps to take to fine-tune your communication skills. Our goal is to set you on the path, but it's your job to start walking.

With so much information about communication already in print, why did we want to write yet another book? Basically, we think that our combined training experiences in various situations and environments over the years give us a unique perspective—one that will be advantageous to you. Our premise is that because different organizational cultures and subcultures respond to various communication styles, it's a good idea to have several appropriate styles in your back pocket.

When you are training or giving a presentation, the skills we offer can enhance the way you interact with your audience. In fact, the greater your range of styles, the greater the chance is that you will reach the desired results with any group under any situation.

Furthermore, we all have comfort zones that are reinforced every time we repeat behaviors. Those behaviors may work for us on a regular basis. However, when a

trainer encounters a group whose cultural backgrounds vary from the trainer's normal style, the trainer must be able to adapt to the group.

By reading this book, going through the exercises, and applying its principles you can practice behaviors that will make you a more flexible and effective trainer. So start walking, experiment a little, take some risks, and enjoy the journey!

Icons to Guide You

This book has plenty to offer in the way of content that can help you every day. We hope you will find it appropriate enough to keep as a reference, and on days when you're feeling frustrated, you'll pour yourself a cup of coffee or a cool drink and sit back for review. But, just so you don't miss all the best parts, some icons will alert you to key features of the book. Here are the ones you'll find throughout all of the *Training Basics* series:

What's Inside This Chapter

Each chapter opens with a short summary that serves as a quick reference to the chapter contents. Use this section to identify the information in the chapter and, if you wish, skip ahead to the material that is most useful to you.

Think About This

These are helpful tips that you can put in your back pocket to pull out when needed in preparation for or during facilitation.
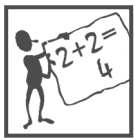
Basic Rules

These rules cut to the chase. They are unequivocal and important concepts for facilitators.

Noted

This icon flags sections with greater detail or an explanation about a concept or a principle. Sometimes it is also used for a short, productive tangent.

Getting It Done

The final section of each chapter supports your ability to take the content of that chapter and apply it to your situation. Sometimes this

section contains a list of questions for you to ponder, sometimes it is a self-assessment tool, and sometimes it is a list of action steps you can take to improve your skills and help increase the chances for participant success.

Finally

We hope you find our scenarios, experiences, and ideas worthwhile. Our goal is to help you become a more successful trainer and shorten your learning curve in the process. We would love to hear your personal stories. Tell us what happened when you tried on new communication behaviors. Please let us know what worked for you and what you learned in the process. In this way, we can all grow together.

Last, we offer a debt of thanks to our families, the arenas in which we first cut our communication teeth and in which we continue to develop.

Judy Jenings
Linda Malcak
July 2004

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Communicating From the Heart

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What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll see how to:

▶ Use this book to help you connect with your participants
▶ Identify whether you are teaching from the heart
▶ Locate material in the book using a chapter-by-chapter outline.

Who Cares About Learning—and Why?

Think back over all the teachers you've had during your life. How many stand out? What do you remember about them? Do you remember how they looked, how they stood in front of your class, how they interacted with your class? Did you look forward to class time? Did you enjoy preparing for their course? Most important, how many of those teachers or instructors had a profound influence on your life, on your learning, on your zeal for their subject? If you're like us, you remember only a select few.

Now think about all those teachers again but from a different perspective. What do you think they thought they were doing? Quite probably, they thought they were

teaching, molding minds, creating a love for their subject. In fact, most people who become trainers do so because they wish to have an impact, share knowledge, create a lust for learning. So, assuming that's the case, why didn't their initial intentions translate into your long-term result? Even more important, how can you become a trainer and instructor who will be remembered by your learners not just this week but perhaps for years to come? It all boils down to communication and how that communication occurs.

To get personal for a minute, if I had to answer my own question I'd say that I remember my second grade teacher, my freshman English teacher, my high-school government teacher, one or two college professors—and that's about it. They are a motley collection of individuals with a wide variety of teaching techniques and methods of interactions who shared two outstanding characteristics: They truly cared about me, and they cared about their subject. Note that this is a two-pronged idea: their zeal for the students was coupled with a zeal for the subject. Let's look at each one.

Zeal for the Students

My memorable few didn't just care about the class as a group, but about *me*. What I learned and how I could apply that learning over the long run were both deeply important to each of these teachers. They showed it, I knew it, and their caring made me care about myself and made me want to learn. Each of those people connected with me as an individual, and in some way I carry with me the strength of those connections to this day.

Zeal for the Subject

Caring isn't enough. Substantial, current content must be passed along in an applicable way. Each of my memorable teachers had a zeal for their subject. They didn't just use the book, teach from the book, finish the book, and call it a successful course. They studied over and beyond what they needed to do for class. They integrated their knowledge into their lives, they were excited about it, and enthusiastic about it. That kind of enthusiasm is contagious because it communicates, it vibrates, and its authenticity engages learners and keeps them interested.

Here's an example: One of the courses I took during college was statistics, which was taught in the education department. I had taken statistics before in another

department, and although I understood the concepts, the field of statistics was never more than a series of senseless formulas to remember, apply, and spit back. You'd think that the second run-through in a different arena (this time education) would have made it sink in. Nope. The subject for me remained a series of meaningless formulas, applications, and so forth.

About 15 years later, though, I was developing two training programs for a major producer of truck engines. The programs were for certified quality engineers, and the topics were basic probability and statistics, statistical design of experiments, and regression analysis. For the first time, the application of this subject (statistics and a few permutations) made sense to me. The engine manufacturer used statistics to ensure that the engine parts had a predictable life expectancy and that truckers were not left stranded with loads of product out in the middle of nowhere. Suddenly that meaningless (to me) subject had a face—a meaning—and the concepts became memorable.

I have been able to apply the concepts of statistics ever since. How much better it would have been if the original instructors would have made this course come alive for me. Putting a real-life application and a need to know on what could have been strictly theoretical makes the student care because the instructor cares!

In short, memorable teachers are masters at making their subjects live for (and later in) their students. They aim for excellence and risk investing themselves and their efforts in the lives of the students sitting in their classrooms.

The best trainers are like this, too. They take time to connect with the learners who are in their classes, workshops, and seminars. They invest their energy, thereby ensuring that learners get the training they need and can put it to use the next day on the job. Like the life-changing teachers already mentioned, these trainers, too, are teaching from the heart. Why is this so vital to communication? It's vital because communication is more than a few techniques, no matter how well mastered. Communication is about connecting. In fact, it's all about connecting.
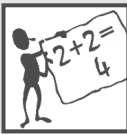
Basic Rule 1

If you don't communicate that you care, you won't communicate.

So Why Don't We Do It?

All right, so if it's such a great idea, why don't many trainers really communicate with their learners? After all, most trainers would rather be remembered than forgotten. Most people like to succeed, and most trainers like to encourage others to do the same thing. So why don't we? What gets in the way?

The answer is that many things get in the way, some of which fall into the nebulous category of techniques. We'll consider those barriers later in this book. The next chapter attacks the biggest bugaboo of all, the monster that gobbles up our energy, leaving precious little for the learners. That monster's name is *fear*.

Here's a Preview

Before you jump into the next chapter, why not take a moment to get an overview of this book? Your success as a communicator will determine your success as a trainer and purveyor of knowledge. Here's how this book will help you expand your skills and increase the chances of success both for you and your participants. Here's a summary of the 12 chapters in *Communication Basics*:

1. "Communicating From the Heart" gives you an overview of the book. It establishes the basis upon which all effective training communication rests—zeal for the students (learners) and zeal for the subject.
2. "Tame the Fear Monster" presents the single biggest factor that often stops trainers from communicating effectively: fear. The bad news is that fear can becomes such an ogre that it colors everything we do in the classroom. The really great news is that fear comes from within and, therefore, is under your control. You can make those butterflies in your stomach fly in formation, and this book shows you how.
3. "Attitudes Speak Louder Than Words" offers you an opportunity to answer the question, "Why are you here?" What values brought you to the training arena, and how can you communicate those values most effectively to the participants in your workshops?
4. "Trainer, Know Thyself" reveals what trainers need to know in order to use personal style in a way that brings the learners into the learning equation. In this chapter, you'll consider why you are training, what you want to accomplish, what you want your learners to walk away with, and how to make them want to come back for more.

5. "Out on a Limb" describes how good trainers take risks that often are somewhat personal. To help learners connect or communicate with us, we must let them know who we are, but just a little bit. This chapter includes techniques to help you listen to your instincts and guide others to do the same.

6. "How Is More Important Than What" shows you how to set the tone before you even start teaching the class. This chapter focuses on respect, attitude, and the effect that a positive approach can have on others. When you model a positive, proactive approach to your learners, they can begin to believe in themselves, in the organization, and in the value they bring to the organization.

7. "Boundaries" addresses what every trainer needs to know about setting boundaries—your own and those that will exist in the training arena. Boundaries are not walls, though. They are bridges to understanding and help others know where they fit in the process and what is expected of them. In so doing, we can spare our learners the unfortunate experience of attending a workshop where the goals are not clear, where the instructor is unsure, and the result is frustration. In addition, by knowing how to set boundaries effectively, you can manage participants whose behavior is often termed "difficult." Whiners, combatants, overzealous superstars, and nonstop talkers won't bring down the class if you operate from the position of personal power that comes from setting effective boundaries.

8. "Trainer as Guru" shows you how to have authority, not autocracy. It's a numbers game. No matter how much you prepare, if you get up in front of people often enough, you're going to hit the question that stumps you. You won't know the answer, and you may not even know how to find it at that moment. Chapter 8 shows you how to walk the tightrope strung between the worlds of expert and colleague.

9. "Listening Is an Art" provides some easy techniques you can use to make someone feel truly heard and understood. You can use these techniques to enhance your personal style and listen for what's left unsaid. Finally, this chapter shows you how to hear what is really being said.

10. "But When I Listen, Nobody Talks!" can help you through those dreaded moments that occur after you've listened, you've presented, you've cared, but no response is forthcoming from the learners. Why don't they open up? This chapter shows you how to listen so people will talk. You'll learn

some tips about how to draw out responses from your trainees, how to clarify, how to answer the hidden questions, and—most important—how to make connections between content and feedback. The skills presented in this chapter should go a long way toward easing that glazed-over look you sometimes see as you are processing exercises.

11. "Nonverbal Cues" shows how you communicate volumes even when you're not saying anything, when you're listening, or when you're thinking. The learners can pick up your nonverbal cues. This chapter helps you pay attention to your own body language and that of others.

12. "To Infinity and Beyond" discusses the skills involved in wrapping up a workshop or training session. How you do it has a great deal to do with whether learners want to return and whether they see any connection between your content and their day-to-day experience in the organization. This chapter stresses ending on an upbeat note, wrapping up effectively, providing takeaway lessons, and building enthusiasm for what's next.

Getting It Done

Spend some time reflecting on the questions in exercise 1-1.

Exercise 1-1. Memorable teachers.

1. When I think back over my educational experiences, which teachers do I remember? Why?

2. Which ones would I most want to emulate? Why?

3. Which ones would I least want to emulate? Why?

4. What traits would I most like to develop in myself to be more effective in presenting to the participants in my workshop?

So, now you have the basic format and some idea of what you'll learn in each chapter. In addition, you have our promise that the materials are applicable, designed just for new trainers, and ready to put to use now. In short, you know that we have zeal for you and for this subject. We intend to communicate that zeal throughout every chapter. Ready to go? Then let's get started!

Tame the Fear Monster

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What's Inside This Chapter

In this chapter, you'll learn:

▶ A four-step process to tame the fear monster
▶ Ways to communicate confidence and consideration
▶ How to use focus to communicate with the participants.

Bill Jackson is a brand new trainer in the HR department at Westvac Corporation. A communications major in college, Bill is one of those guys who never met a microphone he didn't like. As far back as he can remember, Bill could walk into a room full of strangers and comfortably strike up a conversation with just about anyone in the room. He was also a planner with a positive attitude and preferred to be proactive rather than reactive. Finally, Bill has always believed that he, coupled with good solid training content, could make a difference in people's lives and in the life of the organization.

He was really excited about his first training assignment—a five-session series for beginning supervisors. He spent weeks completing a needs assessment, analyzing

the information, choosing the right materials, and then studying everything. He designed and redesigned the agenda, making sure that he allowed optimal time for each segment so that the workshop would be highly applicable and have maximum impact. He worked with the company cafeteria to ensure that refreshments would arrive at the right time. He left no detail unattended.

With all this going for him, how do you think Bill's first session went? Allow him to tell it in his own words:

> "I really don't get it. I was so prepared for that first session. I studied the materials, modified them, and made them my own. I practiced with the overheads and made sure that the timing for the agenda was absolutely right on. My materials were all assembled and ready in the room. I checked all of the electrical cords, the lights, the handouts, the binders. I was ready. So, what happened? I walked in there loaded for bear...and froze. It was as though I couldn't remember what I was supposed to do. Just the sight of 20 people, sitting and staring at me chased every thought about that workshop out of my head. I stammered and searched for words. It was all I could do to get through the training session. I would really be surprised if any of those people even wanted to come back."

When he read the evaluations, Bill was stunned. "The trainer seems to have lots of content but didn't relate to me at all." "Didn't relate to my job." "Too much material." "How does this information apply to me?"

Bill was probably being a little hard on himself and, as many people do, he tended to focus automatically on evaluative comments that pertained to the trainer rather than to the materials and content. And, after a few days, he might have recalled several parts of the workshop that went very well. But, his description of the event might sound familiar to you and to anyone who has ever been taken over by the fear monster.

The Power of Fear

Bill is not alone. Even the most experienced presenter gets a bit of stage fright when it's time to start a workshop. Part of the anxiety is caused by adrenaline (a fight-or-flight hormone produced under stress), which releases a kind of energy that bubbles to the top, ready to be put to use. Oddly enough, this phenomenon

is not necessarily a bad thing. In the hands of an experienced trainer, this anxiety—once harnessed—can translate into a vibrancy that electrifies and energizes everyone in the room.

On the other hand, for the inexperienced presenter, normal presentation anxiety can grow Medusa-like into the fear monster!
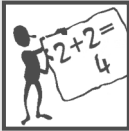
Basic Rule 2

Fear is powerful, and empowered fear is practically inescapable.

If you give into the power of fear, it is more than ready to take over your workshop. Among other things, fear can prevent you from

▸ answering questions clearly
▸ focusing on the participants
▸ thinking logically
▸ connecting with people on more than a superficial level.

More important, fear can cause you to

▸ communicate a lack of confidence in the material and in yourself
▸ separate yourself from the participants
▸ appear to be aloof and cold
▸ seem to be disorganized
▸ fail to cover key points in the workshop.

As a trainer you want the participants to leave with a feeling of confidence, ready to put to use the skills and knowledge they've gained by investing their time in your training session. If you communicate a lack of confidence, their attitude upon leaving will be one of ambivalence at best. At worst, they'll be angry about the time they've wasted and will have no real desire to implement the things you've taught or presented. And, perhaps, as Bill feared, some of them won't come back.

So what can you do? Is there any way to make those butterflies in your stomach behave? The short answer is yes, there is something you can do. In fact, in the next

few pages we will lay out a simple four-step process. If you put it into practice, we promise that you will present better, be more relaxed, communicate more effectively, and see better results in the work lives of your learners.

Four Steps to Success

There are things you can do to make fear fly away or at least keep it at arm's length. In a nutshell, you can send the fear monster running if you always do the following, in this order:

1. Focus on the participants.
2. Focus on the content.
3. Focus on the structure.
4. Follow the plan.
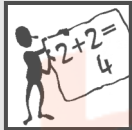
Basic Rule 3

You can't go wrong when you focus on the other person.

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1. Focus on the Participants

On the surface, this advice probably echoes every Dale Carnegie course you've ever heard about. How do you win friends and influence people? It's simple: Ask the other guy about his favorite person—himself. A similar principle applies to you in your role as a trainer. Remember that the workshop isn't ever about you. It's about them—your participants. And, if you want to get down to basics, without them you wouldn't have a job and neither would any other trainer. So, the training experience is always and totally about the learners.

To focus on the participants, you have to get to know them. Here are some specific things you should know:

▶ Who will be there?
▶ Why will they be there?
▶ What one thing do they most need to take away from the workshop or seminar?

▸ What will make their work lives (if not the rest of their lives) better?
▸ What will make them feel comfortable?
▸ What will make them feel alienated?
▸ How do they relate to others in the group?
▸ What departmental barriers exist?
▸ What managerial or supervisory barriers exist?

Many of these things you can learn from the needs assessments that you so carefully conducted to plan the training experience. To learn the rest you'll need to practice PBWA (preparation by walking around). You need to know how your participants work, what their work environment is like, what their day-to-day problems are, what the supervisory environment is like, how they feel about upper management or lower-level employees. In short, you need to know what life is like in their world. The better you know them, the better you will identify with them, and the better all of you will relate.

Put another way: How do you feel when you go to a party and everyone there is a stranger? If you're like many people, you may be a little self-conscious, nervous, or unsure. You're probably wondering what others are thinking about you and how long you're going to have to endure this torture before you take solace in the chips and dip or (worse) the wine.

Now suppose the host has invited many people you know at least a little bit. The feeling is different, right? That's because you know enough about the people in the room that you can somewhat relate to them. In this situation, you are more comfortable walking up to someone and starting up a conversation.

The same is true when you know more about the participants. When you can say "Hi, Sue," or "Hey there, Jim" when they walk into the room, you are already connecting. You are already winning the confidence of not only Sue and Jim, but the others. And you are making yourself feel more comfortable, and more confident.

Therefore, the first step in the process of kicking out the fear monster is to focus on the participants first. Take a moment to complete exercise 2-1. If you are not currently preparing to teach or develop a specific course, choose a group of sample participants from your organization and keep them in mind as you complete exercise 2-1.

Exercise 2-1. Participant group analysis.

1. How large is this group? _____

2. What departments or subgroups will be represented? _____
   _____
   _____

3. What special needs were identified for these participants during needs assessment? _____
   _____
   _____

4. What other needs have I observed from walking around the department or speaking with potential
   workshop participants individually? _____
   _____
   _____

5. Is there anything that will make it difficult for these departments or individuals to interact positively?
   _____
   _____

6. If so, what can be done to increase the potential for positive interaction? _____
   _____
   _____

7. What is the most important thing I can give these people during this workshop? _____
   _____
   _____

8. What would make them feel comfortable? _____
   _____
   _____

9. What would make them feel alienated? _____
   _____
   _____

Take a closer look at the components of exercise 2-1:

- *Group size:* No matter what's going on in the workshop, you need to know this information far ahead of time.
- *Departments or subgroups represented:* Sometimes there are undercurrents or rumblings among departments that could hamper the success of a workshop. If you don't know this going in, you could be blindsided, and the workshop could go terribly off track.
- *Special or other needs:* These may have come to you in private conversation, in a focus group, on paper, through an email, or at the water cooler. Keeping these needs in mind and addressing them directly sends a powerful message to the participants that you are keyed into them, their department, and their needs. It lets them know that their time is respected and that their day spent with you is invested, not wasted.
- *Perceived communication barriers:* If it turns out that there are unpleasant undercurrents among departments, groups, or individuals, then they should be addressed outside of the workshop. The focus for addressing those issues should be on maximizing both the time dedicated to training and the effectiveness of the training. In other words, you want them to get the most out of the experience without the other problems getting in the way. If necessary, speak to your boss, or their boss, to see what can be done to smooth the way before they walk into training. Even better, separate any groups that may be bringing hidden agendas with them. Doing so sends a message that your training sessions are not to be used as a combat arena or a place to score points. Training is about developing habits and skills that positively affect the workday, period.
- *The most important thing for participants to take away at the end of the day:* This information is vital. You must ask this question of every potential participant. That way, you will not only be sure to include those items in the training session, but also (if appropriate) you can identify whose idea or question it was and double-check to ensure that you have covered it sufficiently. In other words, does the person who had this idea have any unanswered (or additional) needs, questions, and so forth? For example, assume that you are presenting a workshop on effective time management. One of the participants has a question handling email in such a way as to avoid getting inundated by an email avalanche. Once you've finished giving a list of

several tips on email management, you should double-check with the questioner to see if you have provided enough information or if there are additional questions. Doing so communicates to the group that you are tailoring this training *just for them.* That goes a long way toward spreading positive press about your training sessions and bringing people back another time.

▶ *Comfortable and not alienated:* As you are gathering your initial information, pay close attention to your participants. What will pave the way for them to feel comfortable in your training session and what may make them feel alienated? Consider amenities, for example. You should accommodate an adequate numbers of breaks, for instance, but it is also worth stating at the beginning of the session that if someone needs to leave for a few minutes, he or she should feel free to do so. If a participant has a sick child at home, she or he may need to call home to check in. Someone else may need to use the restroom and is growing uncomfortable waiting for the break. In either case, these people will get nothing out of your session if they are thinking about their own needs and concerns; so communicate up front that although it's better to have people wait for the breaks, you can understand that sometimes that's not realistic. The participants don't have to ask; they can just get up, take care of business, and hurry back. Similarly, people have different needs and preferences when it comes to food and beverages. If you provide refreshments, be sure that you provide variety. Asking your participants ahead of time about their preferences lets them know that you are thinking about their comfort and that you intend to go the extra mile to ensure they receive value from your session.

Successful trainers know that much of the training relationship is about *perceived* attitude—how the participants think you feel about them, how much respect you have for them, and so forth. Whether their initial perceptions are right or wrong is not terribly important. What matters is how you go about influencing the participants and shaping their perceptions so that they are assured you have their best interests at heart.
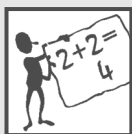
> ## Basic Rule 4
> The content must match the *true* needs of the participant group.

2. Focus on the Content

Now that you are better acquainted with the participants in your workshop, you will more naturally be able to focus on the content. You'll be able to figure out just what they need from you in terms of skills, information, and experiences that will make their workday flow more easily and productively.

If you're like Bill (an eager beaver), and your boss has asked you to present a series of supervisory workshops, you may already have begun digging out the manuals and the software. You've probably logged onto the Internet and researched program publishers, but it's not yet time to order anything. Because, even though you *think* you know what they need and after conducting your initial analysis you know them better than you did before, you're not yet ready to pick just the right program for them.

It's time to pore over the needs assessment again, look back through your interview notes once more, and identify the most salient points. The *pain points* that make the day most challenging or difficult for your participants are the areas you're going to want to address in your sessions. Once you've identified the real zingers, then you are ready to choose your content and begin to study it so that you can present it with confidence.

This method of considering the content is a little different slant because you're not just buying the best package your company can afford. You truly are learning the needs and personalities of the participants, so that you can choose the one that's best for them. In so doing, you are communicating something very important to them— and to you. You are telling them that their contribution is vital to the company and that the smooth flow of their daily work life is a desired goal. Also, you are reminding yourself of the reasons why you became a trainer in the first place: to help others and to do so in the work environment. By focusing on the content as it relates specifically to the people sitting in front of you, you replace fear with purpose and mission. Purpose and mission will give you enthusiasm, enthusiasm will give you energy, and all four will be communicated to your participants.

Use the form in exercise 2-2 to make sure you have focused adequately on the content for this specific group of participants.

Here's why you need the information items listed on exercise 2-2:

- ▶ *Workshop title, date, location:* In your daily work you'll create and complete a mountain of forms and files, both electronic and hard copy. You need to

Exercise 2-2. Participant preparation form.

Workshop title: _____

Proposed workshop date, time, and location: _____
_____
_____

Participant name: _____
_____
_____

Participant department: _____
_____
_____

Reason for attending this workshop:

Background work experience in this topic:

Previous related workshops attended:

keep this paperwork straight. Remember, we're talking about communication here, and if you are disorganized you will not communicate confidence to participants, upper management, or yourself. This seemingly simple information is vital.

▶ *Participant name, department, and reasons for attending:* You may see after collecting or completing all the analysis forms that you have many people from a single department attending one particular workshop session. This over-representation could be good or bad depending on several factors. You may need to prevent them from digressing to department-specific topics during your workshop. On the other hand, if there are problems in that department that the topic in the workshop can address, then you may want to have a separate departmental training session so their needs can be addressed in detail. By collecting this information in advance, you have the flexibility to make that decision, and you are taking hold and underscoring (to the entire company) that training has a distinct purpose and applicability.

▶ *Background experience or previous workshops:* Again, knowing the relative experience your participants have in the topic helps you target the content for a specific group. If everyone has already had a basic time management class, for example, you may want to move the content of yours up a notch.
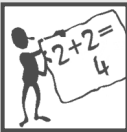
Basic Rule 5

Every successful journey needs a roadmap. You, too, need a structure to guide the training you lead.

3. Focus on the Structure

OK, so now you're focused on the participants, you've chosen the perfect package or designed the perfect workshop, and you are absolutely certain that it will give the participants just what they need in the way that they can most easily absorb it and put it to use on the job the very next day. Nevertheless, you're still pretty scared. What's next?

Well, you need a roadmap, a way to get where you're going with easily marked paths and times. Imagine that you are a student pilot about to take your first cross-country flight. You'll use the instruments and a watch to estimate when the airplane

should reach certain checkpoints during the flight. For beginning pilots this is often a visual checkpoint (a highway, mountain, grain silo, or the like).

You need something like that for your workshop also. Your agenda should include starting and ending times for all mini-lectures and activities, interim times (e.g., amount of time to allow for group processing of an activity), starting and ending times for the workshop, break times, and so forth. You can learn more about this in *Presentation Basics* (Rosania, 2003), but the point of bringing it up here is this: One thing you want to communicate to your participants is confidence. You are essentially leading your little band through alien territory with the goal of coming out successfully on the other side. You cannot lead if you don't know where you're going; and if you cannot lead, you cannot be confident. And, if you are not confident, they will not be either.

After all, why would anyone want to spend three hours (or more) sitting through the torture of watching someone else guess at what's coming up next? Remember that the purpose of training is to focus on the participants and make their workday flow more smoothly. You must have something to give them that will do just that.

Noted

Confidence on the part of the trainer goes a long way toward helping the participants absorb and apply the material.

An ideal time to check your agenda and increase your confidence is during group activities when you can sneak a quick peek at the time, the next item, and chart your progress to that point. Having a prepared, written agenda will help keep you on track and make smooth transitions from activity to activity.

4. Follow the Plan

There's a great book called *How to Sell Anything to Anybody* (Girard & Brown, 1986). The basic tenet of the book is "Plan your work and work your plan." Not surprisingly, it's a sales book written by a sales manager for salespeople. Nevertheless, the concept is applicable here. Once you've assessed needs, connected with the participants, selected or designed materials, and developed an agenda, you're pretty much set. But, you'd be surprised how many people walk into the workshop with that much preparation and fall flat because they don't trust their own process!

In fact, that's probably what happened to Bill (at least in part), the trainer you met at the beginning of this chapter. He had everything done, but he couldn't carry

it off with confidence. At heart, he couldn't trust his process because *he hadn't focused on the right things.*

He didn't focus on the participants or on the content. In addition, because he became so enamored with his own design and plans (even the needs assessment), he didn't take time to truly connect with and know his participants. When he walked into the room, he was walking into a room full of strangers not a room full of acquaintances or friends. He became so involved with the techniques and tactics that he forgot the people. Because he hadn't communicated his concern for them, they did not communicate any empathy for him. This lack of connection and empathy also showed up in the workshop, but Bill was too nervous to notice and modify or check it out. ("John, you seem confused, is there something you'd like me to explain further?" or "OK, I think everyone's eyes are glazing over. Let's take a 10-minute break.")

So, to recap:

▶ Fear will stop you from being effective.
▶ When you are fearful, you communicate fear and a lack of confidence in yourself and the material.
▶ Communication is about perception—and attitude.
▶ Training is always about the participants. By focusing on them and their needs, you can conquer fear.
▶ If the participants perceive that you have their best interests at heart, they will be more inclined to pay attention to the content and attempt to apply it on the job.
▶ Participants will perceive that you have their best interests at heart if you have invested the time to communicate your concern, see things from their perspective, and focus on their specific needs.

Getting It Done

Take a few moments to reflect on what you've learned about the fear monster and how you can tame the monster by focusing on the participants, the content, the structure, and your plan. Now use exercise 2-3 to personalize your learning.

Exercise 2-3. Conquer your fear monster.

1. When you think about conducting a workshop or other presentation, do you feel any anxiety?

2. List three things you fear about conducting a presentation.

3. Now list one thing you could do to ease or eliminate each one of those fears.

4. Identify two colleagues or other people in your organization who communicate confidence when they are in front of a group. Make an appointment to speak with each of them and ask their advice. Find out what they do to get comfortable before a workshop or presentation.
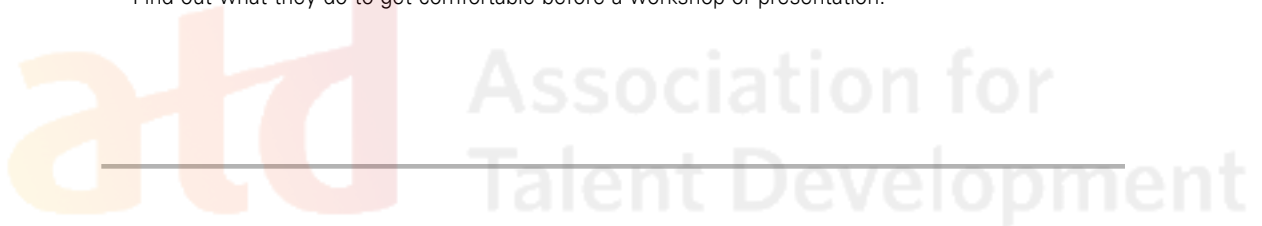
Part of taming the fear monster lies in focus and in awareness. You must be aware of your participants and focus on their needs. The next chapter will help you ensure that you are communicating that concern and focus as you go about your day.

Attitudes Speak Louder Than Words

- -

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll see:

▶ When you are communicating—always!
▶ How to check your own motivation
▶ The value of personal power
▶ How to communicate from a position of personal power.
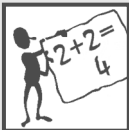
Basic Rule 6
You are always communicating something!

Why are you here? No, this is not the eternal cosmic question that drove the hippies to wander for hours in mind-altering meditation or stare at individual carpet fibers. This is personal. Why are *you* in *this* job, in *this* company, in *this* town, and so on?

Why do we ask? Well, because your reason for being in your particular job, your motive, is a prime influence on your attitude. That attitude colors all of the interactions you have with anyone at work at any time.

So, that brings us back to the original question: What are you doing here, and why do you stay? Of course, answers to that question may vary significantly, but the left-hand column of table 3-1 lists a few we have actually heard from trainers. The right-hand column reveals what these people are actually communicating to the people in their workshops or the others in the company. See what you think.

Know Your Reasons

So, once again, what's your reason for being here and why do you stay? Take a few moments to complete the reflective questions in exercise 3-1. There are no right or

Table 3-1. What they say versus what they communicate.

What They Say	What They Actually Communicate
"It was a good job right out of college, but I don't plan to stay."	You might expect this person to be frustrated. It would be very difficult for someone who was not committed to work as a trainer and to connect with people on a daily basis. This is especially true in the training arena because people can be fractious creatures who have their own minds and don't make the job easy. All of those frustrated, marking-time feelings would come through in day-to-day activities.
"Well, I was really on my way to becoming a Wall Street broker, but my parents wanted me to get a real job. So, one of my dad's friends got me this one."	OK, so this is a slight exaggeration but not much of one. Someone who was "given" a job is not going to value it; that's true for anyone who is given something they have not earned. If a training job is not valued by the person who holds it, then neither will the recipients of training feel valued. If the learners don't feel valued, they won't trust or connect, and if they don't trust or connect, they won't learn. It's a ripple effect. And, this message will be communicated every day, to everyone the trainer meets.
"I always wanted to teach adults. When I got this chance, I jumped at it!"	From the standpoint of day-in, day-out working communication, this is probably the best attitude. These words transmit excitement, sort of an "I finally got what I really wanted" attitude. This feeling makes the trainer value the interactions between the trainers and learners, value the opportunity, and value the company. This person would communicate that excitement to those in the workshop, in the office, even in the company cafeteria. What's more, an attitude of excitement and pleasant anticipation helps get the trainer through the tough times when no one seems to understand what he or she is trying to accomplish.

What They Say	What They Actually Communicate
"I wanted to work my way up in the company, and this job opened up."	Not bad insofar as motivation goes because there's probably no better place than the HR department to learn the ins, outs, and buried skeletons of a company. However, this person has to really be on guard so as not to fall into the trap of feeling bored, stuck, and so forth. He or she will have to work consistently to engender excitement and stay reminded of goals for growth. If that happens and the effort is successful, then the trainer could present a progressive, growth-oriented example to the learners and engender a can-do attitude.
"I like to help people."	Ironically, this response is the kiss of death. This is an incredibly vulnerable position to be in especially if working in HR. There are days when you can't help a living soul no matter what you do. You're powerless to change some things, and you can never truly change people without their willing consent and partnership. So, given the original desire to help people and the proclivity of corporate structure to throw up barriers when you least expect it, this individual could be frustrated much of the time. Furthermore, most people don't want to be seen as a project, they don't want to think that you believe they need "help" because they prefer to think they can help themselves. Any trainer who speaks these words runs the risk of communicating an attitude of superiority and suggesting by that attitude that others are incompetent to run their own lives. This situation is not desirable and definitely not conducive to effective training.
"It was the only job available, and I just had to get out of my old department. Actually, I can't wait until I can move on."	Obviously, this won't work but usually someone with this attitude won't be this honest. They're smart enough to realize that this is not an ideal attitude for working in HR, so they hide their feelings under the veil of professionalism, efficiency, "busyness," organizing, and so forth—anything to keep moving. Unfortunately, this corrosive attitude won't stay hidden for long; it comes out in ways that can't even be imagined, and the learners know it first.

wrong answers, but it's important for you to know for yourself why you are in this position at this moment.

Obviously, exercise 3-1 is going to take some time and thought. It bears reflection, and the last question certainly packs a wallop! One way to answer it is by keeping a running daily log for a while. Jot down the problems you solve, the people you help, and the smiles you collect. Over time, you will begin to see that even on the worst days there are moments of great reward. This one simple daily act may help renew your sense of purpose and reenergize you. People with a sense of purpose and energy are much more fun to be around and are more effective communicators.

Exercise 3-1. Why am I here?

Take a moment to fill in the blanks below. Be scrupulously honest because no one will read this but you.

1. Why did I take this job? _____
   _____
   _____

2. Is there another job I would prefer?   _____Yes   _____No
   If so, what is it? _____
   _____
   _____

3. Why do I stay in this job? _____
   _____
   _____

4. Do I enjoy what I am doing in this job?   _____Yes   _____No
   If so, why? _____
   _____
   _____
   If not, why? _____
   _____
   _____

5. Is there any way that I could increase the opportunity to do the things I love in this job?
   _____ Yes   _____No
   If so, how? _____
   _____
   _____
   If not, why? _____
   _____
   _____

6. How long do I plan to stay in this job? _____

7. Do I have a plan for what to do next? _____Yes _____ No

If so, what is it? _____

_____

_____

8. Am I taking steps to move in that direction? _____Yes _____No

If not, why? _____

_____

_____

If so, what are they? _____

_____

_____

9. What is my value to the company in this position? _____

_____

_____

10. What difference does my being here make? _____

_____

_____
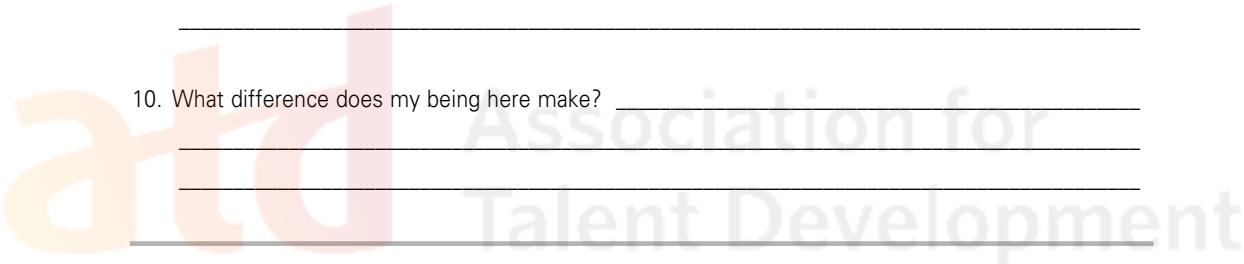
Effective Communication

You're always communicating something. The individuals uttering the statements in table 3-1 were communicating, too. Good training requires not just communication, it demands *effective* communication—the sending and receiving of messages that get the job done appropriately and in a timely manner.
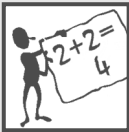
> ## Basic Rule 7
> What you say is not always what they get.

Obviously then, effective communication is not just the ability to talk well or often. It also includes the ability to

▸ hear what is *really* being said rather than what may be said on the surface
▸ read nonverbal behavior
▸ communicate nonverbally (and appropriately) in return.

As a trainer, you want to be sure your nonverbal cues say what you want them to. Many times, when we think we're sending one message, the other person receives something quite different. Here's an example.

Three days ago, Elena joined the HR department at WhatCo Inc. Her title is training assistant, and she is being groomed to move to a full-fledged training position when one opens up. In an effort to get acquainted, she spends a little time each day talking with various staff members. Today, she's going to visit with Phyllis, an executive trainer. Because Phyllis is so experienced and because she's been at WhatCo for a long time, Elena feels a little intimidated and wants to make a good impression. She somewhat anxiously approaches Phyllis's office, knocks on the door, and hears a less-than-enthusiastic "Come in."

When she enters, Phyllis has a slight frown, which stays on her face throughout the entire discussion. Even though she motions for Elena to sit down and seems to welcome the discussion, Elena is unnerved by that frown and feels quite uncomfortable.

Days later, Elena is talking with her supervisor, John, who happens to be a colleague of Phyllis. "I don't know what it is, but I'm pretty sure that Phyllis doesn't like me. I think she resents me being here for some reason."

Later that same day, John and Phyllis are having coffee and chatting. John brings up the topic of Elena. Phyllis says, "I don't know what it is, John, but I wonder if Elena's right for us. She seemed really on edge in my office. I tried to make her feel at home, but she just couldn't seem to relax. I hope she's able to loosen up more with our trainees." She shrugged her shoulders, "Maybe it's just because she's new."

John doesn't get it, and neither does Elena or Phyllis. Unfortunately, none of them realizes that the culprit is neither Elena nor Phyllis, but a horrible sinus headache that had been plaguing Phyllis for three days. Phyllis, hard worker that she is, does not believe in giving in to illness but is finding it impossible to ignore a

persistent headache. So, even though she was soldiering on, the underlying discomfort was causing her to frown, and the headache was taking its toll on this developing work relationship. At some level Phyllis communicated pain, and Elena interpreted that nonverbal behavior to mean that *she* was the cause!
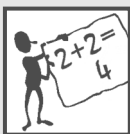
Basic Rule 8
Effective communication begins from a position of personal power.

Personal Power

What is personal power? Before we jump into that, let's first consider what it is not. Personal power is *not*

- power over another person
- autocratic behavior
- loud voices and shouting
- put-downs of other people
- antagonistic or aggressive behavior.

Rather, personal power is the quiet strength that comes from knowing who you are, what you want, and what you are about. It engenders respect, and it stems from respect—for self and for others. Individuals with personal power are not demeaned or belittled by others, nor do they demean or belittle others. A trainer with personal power can be humble and authoritative at the same time, can be funny and make a firm point at the same time, can communicate respect with a glance or a word—and receive it in return. For a trainer to be an effective communicator, he or she must communicate and consistently operate from a position of personal power.

Want to check your own power responses? Take the brief self-assessment quiz in exercise 3-2.

Take a closer look at your responses to the questions posed in exercise 3-2. Check the following explanations to see the answers chosen by the most powerful and effective communicators.

Exercise 3-2. Communication attitude self-assessment.

Circle the answer closest to your normal behavior. (No fair trying to figure out the best answer and choosing that one!)

1. You are relatively new in the company and are sitting in your office one morning. A co-worker, with whom you have not spoken yet today, passes your door and goes into his office. As he closes the door, it slams and startles you. Your first thought is:

   A. I wonder if he's mad at someone.

   B. The doors in this office sure are heavy.

   C. Boy, he must be in a hurry!

   D. What did I do now?

2. You recently have been promoted, as have several others in your department. The boss sent around a memo announcing the promotions, but she inadvertently left your name off the list. When you see the memo, your first thought is:

   A. That's the way it goes; I'm really not appreciated much around here.

   B. What a jerk! Why did she leave off my name? I'm just as important as everyone else!

   C. Oops! I'd better tell her about this; maybe she'll send out another announcement.

   D. How embarrassing! I'll just keep quiet, and maybe no one will notice.

3. You've been stopped by someone in the hallway. You are on your way to a meeting, but this person has an important issue to discuss. While the person is talking to you, you:

   A. Try to think of a response.

   B. Try to look interested while you're thinking about your meeting.

   C. Pay attention and forget about the meeting.

   D. Stop the person, saying, "I hate to do this, but I have an important meeting that I can't be late for. Can we set a time later today to work through this issue?"

4. Concerning personal relationships with co-workers, you:

   A. Prefer to date people who work in your company.

   B. Have some good friends at the office but generally socialize with people outside the office.

   C. Have chosen most of your closest friends from the people with whom you work.

   D. Never spend time with people at the office; you don't go to any company functions and have no good friends at work.

5. It falls to HR to plan the annual company holiday party, and this year you have the responsibility. You checked every departmental schedule you could find, sent out emails to all department heads asking for possible dates, and set the date for the party. The announcement had not been out more than a day before you received a scathing email from a department head telling you that her department has to work overtime that weekend in preparation for the inventory checking that occurs in mid-January. She is livid that the date was set without her approval. Your response is to:

A. Apologize profusely and reschedule the event.

B. Apologize for any oversight but remind her that emails went out and that you asked for her input prior to setting the date.

C. Tell her that she had her chance to speak up about the date and if it doesn't work out for her department that's too bad.

D. Say that you regret any miscommunication but remind her that emails were sent out asking for input and state that the date selected is the best for the departments that responded in a timely manner.

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1. *Powerful choices: B or C.* When you usually assume the behavior of another person relates to something you have done, you are indicating you feel insecure and that you are self-absorbed. If you have no immediate reason to believe the person is angry with you, then the most appropriate (and personally powerful) assumption might be that the doors are especially heavy (and slam easily) or that the person is in a hurry.

2. *Powerful choice: C.* The chances are very good the boss did not mean to omit your name. In fact, she will probably feel very embarrassed when you mention it. If you don't bring it up, however, then she will have to answer questions from others in the company. By mentioning it with tact or even humor, you can help her amend her omission and save face.

3. *Powerful choices: C or D.* Depending on the content and importance of the other meeting as opposed to this discussion, you may choose to stay focused on the other person and arrive late to the meeting, or you may seek to postpone the discussion until later. Either way, you need to make a decision quickly. Part of powerful communication is being decisive when a decision is called for.

4. *Powerful choice: B.* It's important to enjoy the people with whom you spend so much time every day, but it's even more important to have a life outside the office. To find all of your friends at work makes you one-dimensional

and very vulnerable. What if your company decides to downsize and you're out the door? The hole in your life would be much bigger than if you had friends and support outside the work setting. However, it's not necessary to completely abstain from company functions either. An individual who enjoys personal power finds joy in many aspects of life, and work is one of those aspects.

5. *Powerful choice: D.* We hope you just didn't base your answer on the old trick for answering multiple-choice questions: choosing the longest answer. *D* is actually similar to *B,* and the difference between them is subtle but important. By apologizing for an "oversight," you would accept part of the responsibility for this problem. Clearly, though, the ball is in her court. She is undoubtedly upset because now she has placed herself in the unenviable position of being forced either to reschedule the inventory preparation, which could be a problem during the holiday season, or to keep her staff from attending the party. She is trying to feel powerful by taking it out on you and trying to make you feel insignificant or at fault. There may be other things you can suggest or other offers of help that you can make, but to take implied responsibility for her behavior blurs the lines of responsibility in the situation and sets the stage for further negative interaction. The best option here is being firm but friendly.

Patterns of Communication

Virginia Satir (1972, 1988) identified five different patterns of communication. She developed her theories over a lifetime of serving as a family therapist, and routinely preferred to conduct conjoint family therapy rather than individual sessions. She pointed out that although one person in a family often is identified as the "sick" person requiring therapy, the sickness is usually found in the family system itself. The person is acting out the results of the sick family system. This often happens in companies, too.

Satir's five patterns of communication[1] include four "bad guys" and one "good guy," as follows:

▶ *Blaming:* Blamers place the responsibility on another person and deny their own connection to any situation. Chronic blamers find many ways to pass

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[1]Adapted with permission from Science and Behavior Books, 2004.

off the responsibility, and, when all else fails, they usually try nonverbal bullying tactics such as screaming, slamming doors, leaving a meeting abruptly, throwing things (yes, even in the office). Chronic blamers feel powerless and don't realize that by blaming others, rather than taking responsibility, they give away their power continually.

▶ *Placating:* Placaters cannot stand upheaval, nor can they stand to have anyone be upset with them. They always feel a need to smooth over unpleasant situations. The placater doesn't want to make waves or create problems. Placaters are powerless because they place the power for their own feelings of safety and security outside themselves. Because it's impossible to control the behavior of others and to keep others from being angry, the placater constantly feels out of control. Placaters also carry a consistently high level of anxiety, which clouds their judgment and fills them with self-doubt. While there are times when placating is appropriate for the moment, it is not an effective long-term communication style.

▶ *Distracting:* Distracters take others' minds off the topic at hand. They do so in a variety of ways. Remember the class clown from high school? That's classic distracting that most likely stems from boredom and a desire for a little excitement. Or, how about the guy from accounting who always brings up little nit-picky details that derail the discussion? He may be doing this to feel important or to keep the discussion away from more weighty areas such as how to track expenses for some new company project (which accounting hasn't exactly got a handle on yet). Who knows? Then there are the flitters—the people who wouldn't stay on topic if you nailed their feet to the floor. Although it may throw up an effective smokescreen for a brief time, distracting is not an effective form of communication. People who use it frequently may be trying to hide the fact that they feel confused or perhaps lost. This communication pattern is not the choice of a powerful person.

▶ *Computing:* Computers use big words and a cool, distant manner to let others know they are not threatened. It's a way of putting off an aggressor, but underneath the computer is usually scared to death. Computers often end up with nicknames like Ice Queen or Mr. Granite. Computers operate behind a protective barrier that keeps others at bay. They don't really relate although they often appear to on the surface. They leave others with the frustrated feeling that they have not been heard. People exhibiting this pattern of

communication are attempting to gain power over others while revealing little of themselves.

▶ *Leveling:* Here's the pattern that really does improve communication. Leveling occurs when you deal with a situation as it really is, not as you wish it were. A leveler's responses are in sync with the emotions and interactions going on.

So, how might these five types of communicators respond in this situation? Assume that a man runs up to a person and screams, "Quick, my brother's just been hit by a bus! Call 911!" A leveler would react with appropriate concern, grab a cell phone, and dial. A blamer might say, "Honestly . . . those bus drivers need to watch where they are going!" You'd possibly hear these words from a placater: "Oh, no! Don't worry, it's probably not as bad as you think." The unemotional computer would note, "You know that intersection was recently identified as one of the 10 most dangerous in the country." The distracter, though, might say "Uh-oh! Let's go see if we can find a blanket. That might make him feel better."

Blamers, placaters, distracters, and computers communicate out of weakness. They achieve their feelings of self-worth at the expense of others. Levelers accept and own their feelings. They achieve feelings of self-worth without making others pay the price. They operate out of a position of personal power based on respect for themselves and respect for others. This pattern is the most effective for anyone but especially so for someone in an HR training position.

Getting It Done

When you consider that everything you do—every smile, every nuance, every bit of body language, every memo, every announcement, every tone of voice—communicates something to someone, the need for effective communication becomes apparent. Remember, even though you may not feel as though you inhabit a rung that is very high up on the corporate ladder, your status as trainer confers you with power in the eyes of others. It is up to you to use your power wisely, and the best way to do so is through effective, respectful, and personally powerful communication.

Now, take some time to reflect on the issues highlighted in exercise 3-3.

Exercise 3-3. Gauge your personal power.

1. Personal power: What does it mean to you?

2. List two times in the past week when you have felt personally powerful. Do you think your attitude matched your feeling? Do you think your attitude of personal power was communicated to the other person through your words and behavior? Why or why not?

3. Describe one time in the recent past when you did not feel personally powerful. How did you show those feelings to others? Did you use any of the powerless patterns of communication? What was the result? How could you have used leveling to communicate more effectively and regain control?

Once you are clear on the concept of your personal power, you are ready to move ahead. The next step is to identify and clarify your personal style of communication and training. Getting comfortable with your own style is the key to being able to modify it to reach a specific audience.

Trainer, Know Thyself

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll see how to:

▶ Discern your preferred training style
▶ Identify what you plan to accomplish
▶ Vary your style to increase your value
▶ Inspire your learners (and yourself) to return with enthusiasm.
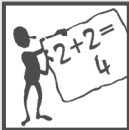
Basic Rule 9

No matter what you do, motivation shines through.

There comes a point in every training career where you should stop and take stock of your situation. At first, you probably hopped onto a training treadmill: learn the content, set up the most conducive learning environment, survive the

presentation, learn the personal range of facilitation styles, take the evaluations to heart, and do it all over again. This approach may work for a while, but at some point you'll stop (perhaps in frustration) and ask, "What am I doing here? What do I want to accomplish, and how do I communicate that to my learners?"

Your initial answer to the question "What do I want to accomplish?" may seem very straightforward: to help others learn, to check off another training topic on the list, and—if you are being honest with yourself—to get high marks on the evaluations.

Unfortunately, training audiences expect a great deal more in today's training world. We live in a video age. Learners expect learning to mirror what they see on television, and they want training to proceed at the speed they associate with learning done on the computer or Internet. There is tremendous pressure on the trainer to be entertaining, on target, a content expert, and able to relate well to the attendees. And, *all* these attributes are necessary to be considered a good trainer. In addition to the distractions you must overcome to meet the expectations of the learners, you will have your own issues to identify and master. So, in spite of the rewards— and there are many—training is not an easy job.

Knowing Your Style Can Help

The first step toward improving your skills and the way you communicate with your learners relates to knowing and being comfortable with your own style. An honest appraisal of your style and true purpose can be an eye-opener for you and a marvelous boost to your training effectiveness. If you are already working as a trainer, you know that preparing for and conducting a training session are a lot of work, and the process can challenge even the most confident person. If you're hoping to make the transition to that point, then knowing your style will put you far ahead of the game.

What is your preferred training style? Take a few moments to answer questions in exercise 4-1.

Your actual answers to the questions in exercise 4-1 are not as important as your awareness. Because all of these choices reflect your personal style, it is most important to be aware of your preferences and identify when you need to adapt them. One style may work better than another depending on the situation. Your flexibility in various scenarios can enhance your skills as a trainer. The following sections

Exercise 4-1. What is your preferred style?

Take some time and give some thought to your preferred style. Circle your most likely response to the statements below.

1. I generally like to dress for training sessions:
   A. In professional attire.
   B. In business casual attire.
   C. In very casual attire.

2. I usually like to set the tone in the beginning of the session the following way:
   A. Read a prepared formal introduction.
   B. Introduce myself with a short overview of my background.
   C. Tell an interesting story or anecdote or pose a question to the group.

3. When the presentation has started, I am more comfortable:
   A. Behind the podium with an attached microphone.
   B. Walking about the room with a lavaliere microphone.
   C. Standing at the front of the room without a microphone.

4. I prefer to manage time during the presentation in the following way:
   A. Follow a published agenda with topics, as well as starting and ending times.
   B. Discuss the topics to be presented and not mention timelines.
   C. Begin the session when the majority of attendees arrive and make sure all the topics are covered before the session ends.

5. During the session, I prefer:
   A. To ask the learners questions to create dialog during the entire session.
   B. To make my presentation first without interruptions and ask participants to hold questions until the end.
   C. To give explanations and stop every 15 minutes or so and ask attendees to paraphrase what I've attempted to communicate.

6. When I have a short period of time to cover several topics, I:
   A. Send out reading assignments in advance of the session.
   B. Provide extra handouts during the session and explain the topics briefly.
   C. Talk faster and reduce breaks to make sure I cover all of the information.

Exercise 4-1. What is your preferred style (continued)?

7. During the session, I prefer:
   A. To use few visual aids and rely on my ability to explain the topics.
   B. To use PowerPoint presentations and distribute handouts that are copies of the PowerPoint slides.
   C. To use a range of visual aids including handouts, video, overheads, PowerPoint slides, flipcharts, and whiteboards.

8. When I present, I encourage interaction by:
   A. Asking if there are any questions.
   B. Creating activities for the group involvement.
   C. Providing questionnaires or tests to complete.

discuss in more detail the range of possible responses and may help guide you if you need to shift out of your comfort zone.

Your Dress

Your choice of dress sets the mood from the moment the participants walk into the room. This visual cue lets them know if your session is to be formal or relaxed. Whatever your preference, it is important to plan the visual message you want to send at the beginning of your session. What you wear sends a strong message about who you are and how you manage your training sessions. There will be subliminal responses from the participants once they learn you are the trainer. More important, they may not be aware of how their perceptions filter your messages and color their responses to you.

Consider the experience of Maria who arrived at her first training session in the company wearing casual business clothes when all the participants were in suits, ties, and jackets. She realized immediately that she had painted herself into a corner by not asking about dress ahead of time. Because she and the participants were already at the location, she decided to handle her opening remarks by remarking on the noticeable difference: "I realize you are all in professional dress; however, I want to create an environment of open dialog today, so my clothes reflect the comfortable attitude I hope to establish early in the workshop. Please take off your jackets and ties, relax, have fun, and participate today."

On the other hand, Marty appeared for his session in a blue suit, red tie, and white shirt. Everyone else in the room was in khaki pants and golf shirts. The organizational culture was definitely relaxed. Marty picked up on some tension in the room so he made a point to go around and introduce himself to the members of the group as they had coffee. He also made a point of removing his jacket, placing it on the back of a chair, and loosening his tie. Later in the session he also took off the tie and opened up his shirt collar. He did this to create a more relaxed environment and open up the group discussion.

Marty considered several ways out of his dress dilemma. For example, he could have kept his jacket and tie on to establish that he was there to be a professional throughout the session regardless of how the rest of the group was dressed. This is a great way to maintain control and indicate to the participants that you are conducting a serious business meeting even though the group may not have anticipated that particular approach. Power dressing can be a useful tool when the group is not automatically willing to grant you the time and respect needed to walk them through the material.

The colors you choose to wear send important messages as well. Dark colors, such as black or navy blue, are considered power colors. Wearing a bright red tie or blouse indicates that you feel passion about your content and, if necessary, that you are ready for a challenge. Earth colors, such as brown, beige, and green, create a calming, secure, and safe environment. This color scheme works well with casual clothes when you really want the group to open up and share in an honest way. Bright colors send a message of high energy, which may be needed to pep up a group. The important thing to remember is that the clothing you wear sends a powerful nonverbal message and sets the mood for the day.

Setting the Tone for a Session

Set the tone and communicate it in a variety of ways through your dress, your manner, and the room setup. All these things tell your participants what's expected.

Ask yourself this critical question: "Am I in front of these people for their benefit or for my own?" It may be tempting to be an entertainer or to be an eloquent, knowledgeable speaker on a subject, but taking on those roles may not meet the needs of the learners. Clarify the purpose for yourself and enhance the opportunity for effective communication by setting clear objectives before you even walk into the room. Then, present the information in an easy-to-understand manner, using common (rather than big and impressive) words and making logical links among topics.

Choosing a Position

How you choose to position yourself lets people know if you are comfortable with the group interaction. Some trainers like the convenience of the lectern to help them keep track of their notes, keep their hands contained, and provide physical support. But, the use of a table or other furniture can be perceived as a barrier by the audience. A microphone is often a choice of presenter's preference and not really an audience consideration. Keep in mind, however, that as the population ages, hearing loss and external noise may inhibit effective communication, making microphones more of a necessity.

Angela, for example, was a new trainer who was very nervous about talking in front of experienced groups and felt more comfortable behind the lectern. She could easily read her notes and grip the sides of the lectern when she became nervous. It gave her something to hold on to and lessened the chance that she would "talk" with her hands. Using a lectern is actually a good technique for those new to training. As Angela's experience and content knowledge grew, she became more confident, and her need to stand behind the lectern decreased. She felt free to move about when she presented to the participants, and her passion for the content came through.

Garcia, on the other hand, was very comfortable moving about the room and felt at ease when he could mingle among the participants. He felt connected when he was close to the participants, rather than standing at the front of the room. Garcia's style worked well for groups of 20 or fewer; however, with larger groups it was necessary for him to present from a platform and use a microphone. To stay in his comfort zone, he used a lavaliere microphone. That way, he was not tethered to the lectern and was able to move across the stage and keep the interest of his audience.

Some presenters think using a microphone is too formal when talking to a group, but the microphone is a convenience for participants who have a hard time hearing. Sometimes trainers turn their backs to the group when they're speaking as they write on a flipchart or point to a slide, thereby reducing audibility immediately. Inexperienced trainers may not be aware of these limitations, and adult learners may never mention they were unable to hear the presenter.

Remember early in this chapter we said that you need to know your style and when it's time to modify? Consider the example of Garcia, a smart and experienced trainer. He was lucky because he had a baritone voice that carried well across the room. At one session, however, there was an air wall in the hotel banquet room the group was using, and the noise from the group next door carried annoyingly through the walls. He spied hotel staff setting up for the meal and quickly asked for a lavaliere

microphone. Even with that microphone, Garcia found that he had to speak up. Garcia's quick thinking illustrates an important point: Part of communicating with the audience is being aware of the technical and physical limitations of the surroundings. Because trainers can't always control the arenas in which they work, they must be vigilant, assess the situation quickly, and think creatively to ensure that the participants receive the intended message clearly.

In a similar situation, Angela wasn't as lucky. Her voice was softer, higher, and didn't carry to the back of the room. In addition, several people were standing and talking in the back of the room, which meant that the people seated toward the back had difficulty hearing Angela's presentation. There are several ways that Angela could have handled this unfortunate situation. One, which would have communicated authority and control, would have been to require the people in the back to leave if they were going to talk among themselves. (She wasn't brave enough to do that, so instead she seethed quietly.)

Angela chose to project her voice by talking louder and in a deeper tone. Later, when she talked over the day and read the evaluations ("Why did this trainer yell at us all day long?") with her supervisor, she came to several conclusions:

▸ Allowing people to disrespect the other participants and the trainer is not a good idea. It's better to communicate your respect of the participants and their time by asking those at the back of the room to conduct their informal meeting in the hall.

▸ Seething can communicate itself in ways you don't intend; it's better to face situations head on.

▸ Never turn down an offer of a microphone. You can always choose not to use it, but if you need one you'll have it on hand.

▸ If the participants can't hear you, they can't apply what you are trying to share.

Utilizing Your Time

Timing is an important issue, and people view the use of time in different ways. Some people become very irritated with trainers who start and end sessions late, but others are appreciative of being able to spend extra time on the topics at hand. You need to assess your group to see what boundaries have been established in the culture of the organization. Either time management method may cause stress for the participants based on how they view the use of time.

Ian was quite compulsive about beginning and ending on time. He believed he had so much information to share with the learners he couldn't waste a minute. As an extrovert, he loved to talk and share what he had learned about his subjects. He truly believed he could make some changes in the world. He scheduled his sessions starting as early at 7:30 a.m., and they would run until 5:30 p.m. He scheduled only one break in the morning and afternoon for full-day sessions. Needless to say, his participants were physically and mentally exhausted by the end of the day.

Noted

Part of the communication skill of a trainer relates to the amount of formal and informal communication time allowed for the participants in the normal course of the day.

Even the most involved participants, listening to the most engaging trainer, find sitting in chairs for long periods of time without a break to be very uncomfortable. Interestingly, breaks can be meaningful times for people to discuss what they have learned during the sessions and exchange ideas. Not only is a walk around the hallway or even outside a healthy practice, it can help keep people stimulated and alert. Ian's overly ambitious schedule implied that his participants were a captive audience, and he was probably afraid (and rightly so) that if he gave them too many breaks they would escape.

Rena, on the other hand, was quick and to the point. She was organized and had learned that breaks and lunch were important to the cumulative experience. She was fairly introverted and would emphasize her main points concisely. She managed to schedule her sessions to start later in the mornings and end earlier in the afternoon, but cover the same material as Ian. Consequently, at the end of the day her participants did not feel drained; in fact, they felt energized and eager to apply their learning back on the job.

Building in Interactivity

Interaction is a powerful way to enhance learning because many people process information through questions and discussion. It can be an excellent way to reinforce the concepts you are presenting and also obtain feedback from the participants about their understanding and acceptance of the information. If you are challenged to deliver much complex information in a short period of time, you may have to sacrifice interaction to create a better learning environment. In this case, consider providing

more written material so that the learners have an opportunity to study the content in greater depth after the session.

Nancy always planned carefully what she would say during her training sessions. She read exactly what was outlined on the PowerPoint slides and was always very intent on covering everything listed on the slides. Even though she provided the participants with hard copies of the slides, she laboriously read each one aloud. By the end of her sessions, there were usually very few questions for her to answer, leading her to conclude that she had been very thorough.

Unfortunately, the opposite was usually true and was often borne out on the evaluations—when the participants finally had a chance to speak up: "The trainer knows the content well, but she treats us like babies. We can read for ourselves!" "There was virtually no opportunity to ask questions." "Boring."

Nancy lost her audience because she gave them little opportunity to interact. In general, most people want additional explanations that go beyond what is on the screen so they can learn more than what the written materials provide.

Yeng, on the other hand, interacted with the group by asking questions periodically throughout his presentation. He also made sure to face the group when he referred to the PowerPoint presentation. He stood near the screen, not the computer and used his mouse to advance to the next point. By engaging the group throughout the presentation, he kept their attention and reinforced what they were picking up from the material he covered on screen.

Covering a Lot in a Little Time

Many times trainers find that they just do not have the time they need to present information in a meaningful way. This is when you must be able to separate your preferred style from the style that is more appropriate given the constraints of time.

Noted

Unfortunately, some PowerPoint presentations are so packed with information that they cannot possibly be well understood during the allotted time. If that happens to you, enhance the opportunity to truly communicate the most salient points by paring down the presentation and creating a more meaningful learning opportunity.

In addition, technology—wonderful though it may be—can cause irritating delays when technical difficulties arise with so-called time-saving equipment. Always have a back-up plan for an alternative presentation method. You have to be able to communicate the message, no matter what happens.

Timing can be everything. It is courteous to start your sessions on time although some factors, such as adverse weather and traffic conditions, are beyond your control. Identifying the nature of the various parts of your presentation (lecture versus participative) helps you see where you can flex the schedule and yet cover the most important points.

Johanna, a laid-back person, learned something as a new trainer when she was conducting team-building activities. Surprise! The number of team members present when interactive sessions begin makes a big difference. A great deal of precious time was wasted repeating the directions to the late arrivals. At first, she found it difficult to relax and go with the flow. She felt insulted that she needed to plan other introductory experiences (not critical to the main learning objectives) to fill time until everyone arrived. She took it in a personal way, the participants picked up on her attitude, and they noted it on the evaluations.

As she matured in her skills and confidence, Johanna became more relaxed and expected (even looked forward to) the interruptions. Her naturally relaxed style came to the fore, and she found she could accommodate the major goals of the group and take advantage of the entire training session even when some members of the group were not present.

George had a style that was more firm. He believed it was important for everyone to be present when the session was occurring. He set the tone early in the session and had been known to make comments about everyone being in the room before he would move forward with the session. Some of the participants appreciated the leader taking charge and setting boundaries so they could be sure to get through the agenda. Others were intimidated by this approach, and some even hesitated to participate because they viewed George as unapproachable.

Although George might not want to change his approach, he did need to be aware he could not control the perception of the participants. They filtered his information through their own lenses. George had to be extra careful to note which of his participants were quieter, make a point of connecting with those people, and draw them out. He tempered his dogged adherence to schedule and time by explaining, "I hate to be so dogmatic, but we have lots to cover and I want you to have full

benefit of this information." Framing the need for punctuality in terms of respect for the learners and value of the information he was presenting went a long way toward helping others understand that he was not just being pushy.

Choosing Visual Aids

This is a visual society. The advent of television more than 50 years ago has made us more dependent on what we see and hear. Although you probably have a preference concerning visuals, that preference won't be shared by everyone else in the group. Some of your learners prefer text on paper, and others gravitate toward charts, pictures, and graphs. Some learners are auditory and prefer your spoken words over anything visual. In the last 15 to 20 years, educational institutions have stressed the importance of addressing multiple learning styles and considering multiple intelligences. As a trainer, this trend means that you have to communicate in a variety of ways, even though many of those ways may be neither natural nor comfortable for you.

If you're a natural talker, you may feel burdened by the need to communicate more visually. Admittedly, it takes a great deal more time to prepare effective visual aids in advance of your session. The good news is that you'll reach some members of the group that you would have missed, and your visuals won't get in the way of the messages received by the auditory learners. In addition, the visuals may clarify parts of your message for everyone. It could be a win-win situation.

Lori loved flipcharts. Because she began training when flipcharts were about the only visual aid available, she learned many creative ways to use them during her sessions. She really liked using one flipchart stand at the front of the room for processing small-group discussions. Lori's practice was to write a question or topic on the flipchart. Then, she would divide the participants into groups of four or five and allow time for the group members to discuss the question or topic among themselves. Each group was charged with having one member serve as a recorder. At the end of the allotted time (usually five or 10 minutes), the recorder from each group would come to the front of the room and write the group's answers or comments on the flipchart.

By allowing interaction time and movement, Lori increased the focus on the intended topic and generated energy in the group at the same time. Small groups also broke down barriers and helped people get to know each other on a personal level. This approach yielded opportunities for shy people to offer their thoughts though they probably wouldn't have done so in a large group. By providing such an

opportunity, she enhanced the options for communication with the small groups and within the larger group, and she communicated her respect for the participants and their contributions to the group learning experience.

Alfredo figured out PowerPoint is almost expected in most training programs. He came to realize through experience, however, that PowerPoint is a linear, preprogrammed presentation. This technology offered Alfredo a guide to keep him on track with his content, but it had a downside. Sometimes a presentation needed to be flexible, and PowerPoint didn't afford Alfredo an opportunity to vary from the original design. In addition, using PowerPoint resulted in a one-way pattern of communication. Although this technology helped Alfredo to be more comfortable, he became more selective about when he used PowerPoint in his training sessions. He is now experimenting with other tools.

Although overhead transparencies no longer seem to be in vogue, they are a very effective tool. You can use color to project lively cartoons, directions, and signs on the screen. Ramona is one trainer who used transparencies according to the ebb and flow of the group. If the learners shifted to a topic before it came up on the agenda, she could easily change to the stack of transparencies that dealt with the topic of the moment and thereby provide relevant support and research information. She used blank transparencies to capture comments from large groups when a flipchart would be too small to be seen from the back of the room. An added benefit of this approach is that overhead projectors are less likely to fall prey to technical difficulties.

Though often overlooked, handouts can be an important part of the reinforcement process. Learners generally like the opportunity to make notes and have something to refer to after the session has concluded. However, make sure the font size is large enough for everyone to read. Use color whenever possible to separate concepts and to accentuate key points. Most learners will appreciate the extra time you take to create clear and meaningful material.

Encouraging Interaction

Effective communication in your workshop sessions is measured not only by the messages you send but by the environment you create. Your response to questions early in the session sets the tone for inquiry by learners. If you are open and encourage participation, most groups become involved. By building in activities to engage the participants, you accelerate participation.

So how do you encourage interaction? Simply asking, "Are there any questions?" usually doesn't do it, yet many trainers cling to this approach as proof that they are doing their best to stimulate discussion. The key is to engage people at the beginning. If you do, you stand a better chance of having more people actively participating by the end of the session.

Ramona was an experienced trainer. She worked over the years to learn more appropriate responses to comments made by the attendees. At first she used responses like "Good job!" and "That is a great answer!" They seemed positive and appropriate on the surface. But, then she began seeing comments like, "The trainer was always looking for the right answers to her question." "I didn't feel free to respond because she seemed to be looking for specific answers." Ramona realized that she was giving the false impression that she seemed to be looking for certain "right" answers.

Now she does things differently. By simply paraphrasing what she hears from the group, she reinforces the learners' comments and lets them know they've been heard and understood. One of the principal types of feedback people respond to is being listened to in a meaningful way. (You will read more about listening later in this book.)

Who's the Training for, Anyway?

Charlie was an experienced quality assurance trainer, but he often had to remind himself during his sessions who he was there for and his purpose. He found himself in an unenviable position, a sort of Neverland between upper management and the session participants. The problem was that upper-level management wanted him to send certain messages and was looking for specific changes in employee behavior and understanding. The learners picked up on this and clammed up. Their comments in the training session often did not reflect their true feelings or understanding. By trying to force top-down agendas on the training environment, upper management was actually thwarting its own goals. If he acceded to management's pressure, Charlie would have felt caught in the middle, and his effectiveness would have been blocked. He knew that the real measure of training effectiveness is gauged by what happens after the session, when the participants return to their jobs.
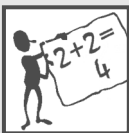
> ## Basic Rule 10
> The more you try different styles of presenting, the more skilled you'll become at making changes for the benefit of the group.

Early in their careers most trainers spend so much time learning the content that they lose sight of the process. Trainers need to learn to use their intuition to evaluate the group and identify what is needed by the group at the moment.

Some trainers cling to their favorite style to avoid looking unprepared or unknowledgeable. Being asked a question if you don't know the answer can be paralyzing. It is easy to overlook the most effective response, "I don't know, but I'll find out and follow up with you." Instead, trainers often give an answer (any answer that sounds good) on the spot. Sometimes this approach works, sometimes it doesn't. After finally realizing they can't be an expert on everything, most trainers become more comfortable asking the opinions of other members in the session or doing some research and sharing the results at a later date.

Choi designed and conducted a series of team-building sessions. Several members of the most profitable new-product development team challenged their use of the time allotted for the session. The participants believed they had more important issues to address than those that Choi had planned to present. That situation could have been extremely threatening to Choi, especially early in his career. But, by now Choi was experienced and confident enough to swallow his pride and allow the team to take charge of the session. They worked an entire day prioritizing and reevaluating their goals. Although as the trainer, Choi remained attentive to the process and facilitated by offering suggestions, basically he stayed out of the action. The reward was that the group felt a great deal of accomplishment and satisfaction at the conclusion of the day. This would not have happened if Choi had clung steadfastly to his original design.

In the end, use your strengths and be your own person. Remember you are there to *facilitate* learning for the participants. Your preferred style may be a perfect fit, or you may need to adapt depending on the situation. Knowing yourself well can save some heartache when you encounter groups whose preferences are not a perfect match with your strengths.

Getting It Done

You've had a chance while reading this chapter to consider how you can vary your style, your dress, or your original design to communicate authority, experience, flexibility, and respect. Take some time to reflect on the questions in exercise 4-2 before moving on to chapter 5.

Exercise 4-2. Knowing yourself.

1. Which concept or key point made in this chapter seems to stand out for you and why?

2. Can you think of behaviors you want to modify based on what you've read? If so, what?

3. What new tips or ideas will you put to work on your next project?

4. How does knowing your own style help you communicate more effectively with your learners?
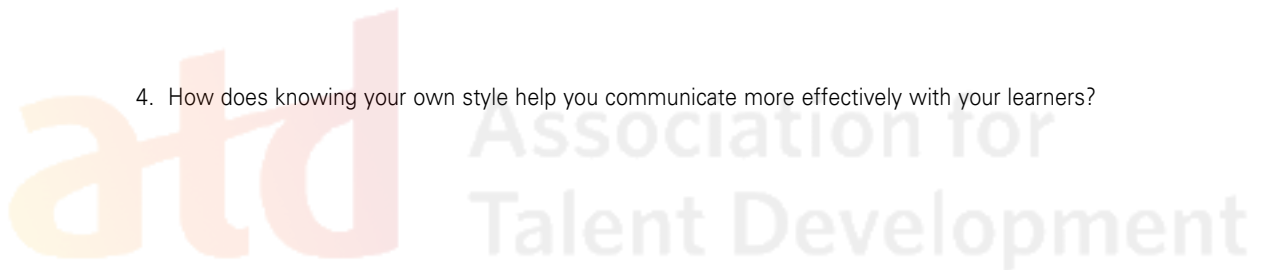
This chapter urged you to know yourself, understand your own style, and try to stretch it to reach specific audiences. Once you have good self-awareness, the next step is learning to trust and to risk—within limits.

5

Out on a Limb

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll learn:

▶ The value of communicating on a personal level
▶ Points to consider when going out on a limb
▶ The gap between perception and reality
▶ Ways to communicate trust.

How John Made a Connection

John was nervous. He was about to walk into a training session feeling very unprepared, which he rarely did during the 15 years that he had been a training professional. He'd gotten off to a timely start earlier that morning, but there was a terrible wreck on the highway, traffic was backed up for miles, and he was stuck on the interstate awhile. What was normally a leisurely review of the day's activities and agenda began as a distracted effort to stay focused and ended in a mad rush to get everything organized at the last minute.

Fortunately, John had been at this long enough; he understood what he needed to do. He knew that it would be very easy for frustration and confusion to consume

him. He also knew that if he didn't do something drastic to connect with the participants the day could be a disaster. So, he changed directions, modified his opening exercise, asked everyone to find a partner, and gave them this assignment: "Please choose a partner. Then interview that person so that you can introduce him or her to the group. Be sure to tell us where your partner works, what your partner does, and how long your partner has worked for the company. In addition, each of you is to identify one thing that is getting in the way of you fully participating in the workshop today. What barriers to participation walked in with you today?"

He allowed the group 10 minutes to conduct their interviews, then announced it was time to begin the introductions, starting with his own: "It's time to do the introductions, and I'll go first. My name is John Ferguson. I'm a senior trainer in the HR department, and I've been with the company for nine years. My barrier this morning is frustration. I'm frustrated that I got to work in such a fragmented state this morning. Normally on a training day I'm here early, with plenty of time to review, so that I can start the session in a relaxed way. Today, however, there was a terrible accident on the highway, and I was stuck on the interstate. I was bemoaning my fate, fretting about losing out on my normal, relaxed review of the day's activities until I drove past the wreck. There was little remaining of one car, and the other two were pretty torn up, too. At least two people were killed, and several were injured seriously. I decided just a minute ago that no matter what happens this morning, my day is better than the day that the families of the people in those cars will experience. I'm just grateful to be here and grateful that when the day is over I can go home to my family."

The room fell quiet. John had connected. Each person in the room could relate to his frustration, to his ultimate gratitude. He relieved his own frustration and anxiety and created a roomful of companions in the process.

John was doing something that effective trainers do often. He went out on a limb to relieve his anxiety, connect with the participants, and create a bridge of understanding with the group. In so doing, he also communicated the most powerful trait a trainer can possess: trust in the participants, in the process, and—most important—in himself.

Some Things to Consider

Check your own comfort zone when it comes to relating to the participants on a deeper-than-superficial level. Complete exercise 5-1, then read on to check the
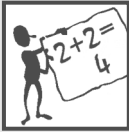
Basic Rule 11

When you share something personal about yourself, you can connect with the participants on a human level.

explanations of the answers. The sections that follow highlight some things to consider about your possible answers.

Exercise 5-1. Finding the limits of your comfort zone.

Circle the answer that comes closest to your true feelings.

1. When it comes to relating to the participants:
    A. I prefer to keep my personal feelings to myself but will share some of them if I believe it's really necessary.
    B. I am comfortable sharing most of my personal feelings at almost any time.
    C. I share nothing about myself, preferring to keep the focus on the content.

2. Concerning the participants in my workshops:
    A. I would be comfortable going to lunch with them.
    B. I would be comfortable talking casually with them during breaks, but not going to lunch.
    C. I would be comfortable going out in the evening with them, drinking, and having fun.

3. Which of the following would be OK to share with participants? Circle all that apply.
    A. Personal life details (e.g., divorce, adoption of a child)
    B. Training mistakes you have made
    C. Training successes you have enjoyed
    D. Problems you have encountered professionally
    E. Personal challenges you have faced (e.g., physical, medical, social, educational)

When It Comes to Relating to the Participants . . .

The most open answer is *B*. If you answered *C,* you risk establishing a distance between you and the participants that may limit their ability to trust you and may reduce your credibility with them. Remember that perception is reality, and if you are perceived by the participants as being able to relate to their daily work life, then

your credibility is enhanced. You can only enhance your credibility by communicating at their level.

On the other hand, *A* is not a terrible answer *if* you can truly identify times when sharing is important and *if* you are confident enough to open up if needed. The clincher is the word *if.* The risk is that rather than opening up, you will define the *if* situations very narrowly and may not be in tune with the participants to know when such sharing would be helpful. You'd be walking something of a thin line.

Concerning the Participants . . .

Socializing is not the same as sharing. Socializing can reduce your credibility rather than increase it. While it's dangerous to create a wide gulf between you and the participants, it's equally dangerous to blur the lines of relationship within the corporate structure. Lunch is good, but going out for drinks is not.

If you find that you are not comfortable sitting down to lunch and can only go as far as chatting at break, then you're implying a feeling of vulnerability. Although it's normal for new trainers to experience this need to distance themselves somewhat, that tendency should decrease with experience.

Which of the Following Would Be OK . . . ?

Communication is not just a skill; it is an awareness that lets your comments and body language be appropriate to the situation. Although it is vital to know *how* to communicate, it is just as important to know *what* to communicate. Your answer to this question lets you know how adept you are at drawing the line between the things that bring you closer to the participants and those that distract or separate.

Sharing professional mistakes and successes is an exercise in humility and one you should practice often. By allowing the participants to see when, where, how, and (in some cases) how often you have messed up, you let them know that it's possible to make mistakes, correct them, and still come out smelling like a rose. Remember, by virtue of your position, the learners will grant you some credibility. By being humble and using your mistakes as learning opportunities, you cement that credibility and communicate personal strength and power.

Sharing personal life details, however, is not a good idea. First of all, it opens you up to speculation and gossip and makes your life the focus of discussion instead of the topic at hand. Feeling the need to share personal life details is a sign that you are trying to draw more personally from the training experience than might be wise. It

communicates a vulnerability to the participants and could damage your professional credibility.

It may be a good idea to share problems you have encountered professionally, especially if you can point to the ways in which you approached the problems and solved them. This approach communicates strength and forward progress and serves as an example that could be emulated.

Discussing personal challenges could also be valuable if they relate directly to the topic at hand. Again, this should be done from the standpoint of illustrating how personal challenges can be faced, strategized, and overcome. Showing others how you have become successful is a powerful thing to do and communicates caring and strength of character. Nevertheless, be sure that your learners can relate to the topics you discuss in this manner and that those experiences are directly illustrative of the topic at hand. To do otherwise would risk using your automatic power in a self-serving way.

The Perception-Reality Gap

Being a trainer comes with its own built-in barriers to success, many of which are related to the position of the trainer as perceived by the participants. The trainer, who's the one in the front or the room wielding a pointer or Magic Marker, is seen as a powerful purveyor of knowledge or skills. Participants often extrapolate from the classroom arena to create a mental picture of the trainer as someone with a perfect life (both professional and personal) that is always well ordered, with kids who don't misbehave and spouses who are always supportive. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. In this case, though, perception is much more powerful than reality.
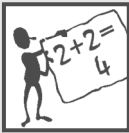
Basic Rule 12

The learners' perceptions become their reality.

With such a gap between perception and reality, it's difficult for the trainer to really communicate with the participants and for the participants to really listen to the trainer. To bridge the gap, trainers must reveal themselves to the participants, become acquainted with the participants on a human basis, and expand on the common ground they share with the participants.

The Day From Hades

Laura, an experienced trainer, was volunteering her time to serve as a trainer for boards of community organizations. Many trainers were enlisted to be part of this volunteer effort, and all of them used certain materials provided by the funding organization.

When Laura and Glen, her co-trainer, walked into the training room, they saw that this board had some very powerful members. Two of them were training and consulting legends in the city, and another was a well-known and very outspoken radio personality. Though she did not want to admit it, Laura felt intimidated.

To make matters worse, it became quite clear as the trainers facilitated the early part of the session that this board had already developed beyond the materials provided for this type of training. As a group, they already had progressed far into the organizational process and were now growing frustrated at the prospect that having given up a precious Saturday they might be spending it going over familiar ground. Laura was feeling that old familiar glitch in her stomach that told her things were going downhill fast.

During one of the small-group activities, Laura pulled Glen aside and said, "We have to change this workshop right now while everyone is still being polite, or we're going to have a major mutiny on our hands, and I wouldn't blame them." Although he was a little bit surprised, Glen agreed to go along with her idea.

At the end of the activity, Laura announced, "I can sense that there's a mismatch between the needs of this group as I perceive them and the materials that we have ready for you today. That concerns me because I do not want to waste your time, and I feel that this day could be profitably spent. The problem is that I am not quite sure where to go next with you. What would you like to do?"

The suggestions came fast and furious, and Laura and Glen were hard-pressed to get them all recorded on the flipchart. Finally the flow of ideas slowed to a halt. Laura looked at the list and turning to the group said, "OK, I can see by this list that this group is ready to begin working on the bare bones of a strategic plan. Does that sound right to you?"

The board members nodded. At that point, Laura said, "All right, let's take a 15-minute break. When you come back we'll start developing the strategic plan."

While the group was on break, Laura and Glen put together a quick planning process that could lead the group through the beginnings of developing the organization's

strategic plan. At the end of the day, the board was as tired as the trainers, but the time had been spent productively. Laura called it the Day From Hades, one she wanted to forget. She was relatively sure that the two experienced trainers on the board were not impressed with her skills.

A couple of years later, Laura ran into one of the "training legends" who had been part of that unforgettable experience. She was amazed when he introduced himself to her, saying, "I remember you well. I'll never forget that day. You're the only trainer I ever knew who stopped the workshop cold and totally changed the plan midstream. That took guts. No kidding."

There are many things that trainers do to communicate credibility to the participants. But, nothing communicates credibility and builds trust as well as being able to modify a training experience on the fly. Learners are impressed when you respect their commitments by developing a more time-effective and meaningful workshop on the spot. To do so, a trainer must go out on that often uncomfortable limb.

How to Go Out on a Limb—Safely

You might have read the preceding vignette with a shudder, saying to yourself, "No way!" Obviously, Laura was experienced, but less-experienced trainers could have done the same thing because experience is not the major key to success in this instance; the key is trust. To do what she did, you need to have trust in three things: the participants, the process, and yourself.

Trusting the Participants

Trusting the participants means that you assume they are there for a purpose and that their time is valuable. When you treat the participants and their investment of time and attention with respect, you communicate trust and build bridges rather than walls. Laura showed that she trusted the participants when she admitted the obvious—the material was not designed for boards with their level of organizational readiness. She did not want to waste their time by continuing to drag them down a path they'd already traveled.

Trusting the Process

Laura trusted the process, she had confidence, and she communicated that to the participants. As a result, they were confident that the day would move ahead

smoothly. Once she assumed that the participants were there to put in a productive workday, Laura was able to see that all she had to do was facilitate the process by setting it up and keeping it moving forward. If she did that, she would be able to give everyone a positive experience and set this board on the path to organizational effectiveness.

How did she communicate trust in the process? Laura let the participants know that she trusted the process by jotting down all of their ideas, looking over the list, and making a quick assessment. Her expertise (and value-add to this board's specific training experience) told her that the board was ready to start on a strategic plan.

Trusting Yourself

Finally, Laura trusted herself. Her instincts told her things were not going well. We all have been captives in workshops in which the trainer or presenter barrels ahead, oblivious to the fact that the material is inappropriate or that the participants are growing restive. One of the best communication skills you can fine-tune is one of inner communication—your gut instincts. Learn to listen to them, check them out, and then act on them. You notice that Laura did not just switch the workshop around without checking with the participants. She respected them—and herself—enough to check before she changed.

The Value of Going Out on a Limb

Imagine yourself in either of these two vignettes. Would you have felt comfortable revealing yourself to the participants as John did or responding to the participants' needs as Laura did? Before you utter a resounding "No!" let's look at the value of what they did, remembering that we are talking about communication.

We all know that actions speak louder than words. That old adage is particularly true in a training session. Most trainers make liberal use of the concepts of active learning, or collaborative learning as it's sometimes called. They provide a mini-lecture of new content and then ask the learners to participate in an individual or group exercise, after which the whole group discusses the outcomes of those exercises. For the participants to absorb what you are presenting, they have to be engaged, and they must want to listen to you (or have a desperate need for the content). By revealing yourself somewhat to the group, you can engage them. Some will like you, some will think that you are just like them, and others may just find you interesting. You cannot control what

others in the room will think or feel about you, but you can at least be assured that they will hear what you say. That means they are getting the value of the content.

As for adjusting your own agenda to suit the participants—that communicates credibility, passion, and personal power:

▶ You become more credible in their eyes primarily because you have recognized them and their needs, and you are confident enough to change paths or directions to achieve better overall results.

▶ You demonstrate that you have a passion for what you do. In training, you are not working with widgets but with people. Good trainers are not only passionate about content but also about the people who attend their workshops and seminars. That type of passion is contagious; the learners leave with renewed commitment and energy for the job. Of course, passion is pointless without proof. So, the proof of your passion as a trainer is found in the solid information you provide that is immediately applicable on the job. In other words, their succeeding workday is going to go more smoothly because you have provided skills and information that applies directly to them.

▶ You show that you possess the strength to step out from behind the agenda and the content, to truly connect with the learners in a results-oriented way. That way, you are operating from a position of extreme personal power. A personally powerful trainer knows that no matter what happens, he or she will survive handily. People respect power, but they *really* respect personal power.

Helping Others Across the Gorge

Now you know how to go out on a limb and communicate your respect and concern for the learners and their ability to put your content to use in a practical way. But, communication is a two-way street. How do you get them to do the same thing—reveal a little bit more about themselves than they might otherwise?

This is where you have to sharpen your intuitive skills. You have to support those skills with some research. If you are a consulting or contract trainer presenting a workshop offsite with participants who are employed by different companies, then you may have an easier time helping people open up. There won't be the implied threat that what they say in the workshop will get back to the boss. (Hint: It doesn't matter how often you repeat, "What's said in the room, stays in the room." People aren't going to say anything in your session that may come back to haunt them.)

If, however, you are conducting a workshop that involves only people from your organization, then you need to know the answers to the following questions:

- ▶ Who will be in the workshop?
- ▶ What department(s) do they represent?
- ▶ What relationships exist among the departments represented?
- ▶ Are there any interdepartmental dynamics currently in place that could block the successful participation of specific individuals?

If the answer to the last question is yes, then perhaps you need to move some of the participants to another workshop.

In any case, it's vital that you pay close attention to the verbal and nonverbal communication coming from your participants. That lady sitting with her arms folded in the back of the room is probably not listening effectively. That guy who's busily checking off items in his business planner is probably not hearing a word you say. What you have to find out is why.

Listen to your inner voice, the one that tells you something is amiss. Learn to check it out. Avoid the temptation to use teamwork time as a chance for you to regroup or relax. Instead, pay close attention to how the groups are interacting. Do the participants appear to be engaged in the activity or are they merely going through the motions? What can you do right now to increase interaction? To draw out the quiet participants? To keep groups on target?

Subsequent chapters will give you some common techniques that will help you fine-tune your communication skills. All of them will be helpful in one way or another. But, nothing you do—no technique, no theory—is more effective than connecting with the participants on a deeper, human level. To do that, you must sometimes go out on a limb.

Getting It Done

In this chapter, you've seen how you must sometimes go out on a limb to build trust and connect with your learners. Assess where you are in terms of your ability to go out on that limb based on your ability to build trust by addressing the questions posed in exercise 5-2.

Exercise 5-2. Are you ready to go out on a limb?

1. What special things do you do to connect with your learners?

2. How intuitive are you? Can you sense when things are not going well?

3. Do you act on your intuition or try to ignore it and forge ahead with your original plan?

One more thing about going out on a limb: how you do so is very important. Revealing something about yourself from a position of humility and shared humanity can bring you closer to the group and build connections. Doing the same thing from a position of condescension or obvious preaching closes doors. As you'll learn in chapter 6, it's more about how, than what.

How Is More Important Than What

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll see how to:

▶ Set the tone—before you teach the class
▶ Show respect by being considerate and appropriate
▶ Be positive and assert a can-do attitude.
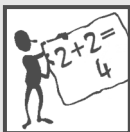
Basic Rule 13

A real-life experience can illustrate messages important to the content of your session.

Silk Purse From a Sow's Ear

Judy is *not* a morning person. Nevertheless, her story begins early one morning when she climbed into her car, turned the key, hit the garage door opener, and went nowhere. The electric garage door opener was uncooperative. Judy and her car were stuck in the garage. The outdoor team-building exercise she had scheduled for that day was to be held in a private park in the woods, a good hour away. Of course, it was raining, too. So far, she was batting zero.

Arriving late to an assembly of other, not-so-pleased, soggy people, it was a challenge for Judy to put on a happy face, knowing what a tough day they had ahead and the challenging activities on the agenda. Fortunately, she had some back-up—her co-trainers (professional facilitators) who *were* morning people. They already were on site and on task, introducing themselves to the participants and setting out the equipment for the day.

At first, Judy found it a real challenge to regain her composure, climb out of panic mode, and get on track with the day's program. But, as lead facilitator she really had no choice. Thinking quickly, Judy fell back on one of her favorite ways to break the ice at the beginning of a session.

Although she had worked with these participants for years and knew them pretty well, she suggested they start by answering a few basic questions that each person would answer individually:

▶ What is your name, department, and position?
▶ Why are you here today?
▶ What are your expectations?
▶ What are your fears?
▶ Tell us something most people wouldn't know about you.

Although the questions vary, these starter chats establish an atmosphere of openness and honesty right from the start. They create a comfortable environment for everyone. It is amazing what people can learn when everyone opens up. Co-workers often realize how much they have in common with someone else. They may also discover that they want to learn more about someone they've "known" for years. This phenomenon is much more likely to occur when another person has shared something personal.

Noted

Use starter chats to help everyone relax, focus, and prepare to participate.

Judy introduced herself last and shared the story of her garage-prison. The story evoked different reactions, ranging from laughter to disbelief. What kind of person gets trapped in her own garage?

Later, of course, she received many suggestions. She learned more about garage door openers than she ever cared to know and was advised to set her alarm an hour earlier next time—just in case. The important thing was not the advice she

received but the connection she made. Important outcomes of the Great Garage Gaffe included the following:

- connection with the participants on a deeper level because the shared experience made Judy seem a little more human
- group resilience allowing the group to forge ahead in a variety of beneficial ways that might be quite different than what was originally planned
- awareness that groups of adults come with rich arrays of talents, experience, and hobbies
- increased comfort level of the participants, making them more willing to share their own foibles and more willing to invest themselves in the day's activities.
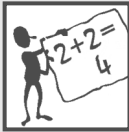
Basic Rule 14
Respect comes in many shapes and sizes—and the little things really do count.

Adult learners want to share in the learning and in the teaching. They have a great deal of experience that can truly benefit the group as a whole. On the other hand, it's also possible that the newest employees can be a wealth of information because they have just entered the organization. Their perspective is very different, and they bring with them ideas from other organizational cultures that could be a breath of fresh air. These newbies can sometimes initiate change with seemingly off-the-wall ideas. It's also possible that someone in the group had the very same idea years ago but the timing wasn't right. Now, it just might work!

Contact Is Often More Important Than Content

Your responsibility as a facilitator is to be sure all opinions are heard and received with respect. Often there are people in the group who criticize concepts that might rock the boat. As the moderator of the group, it's up to you to create a safe environment for participants to volunteer information and ask questions. You can reinforce these attempted contributions in many ways. Here are a few:

- Acknowledge the suggestion.
- Respond to the comment with your time and attention.
- Provide a sincere answer or response.

Noted

Even if you don't know the answer, receive the question with respect and preserve the dignity of the individual.

The quality of your reaction to various comments can either open up the group for dialog or shut it down immediately. Examples of ways to handle new ideas could be as simple as:

- ▸ "You know that idea could really work. Perhaps we should do some additional research and report back to . . . ."
- ▸ "Let's see if we can move that concept forward. Are there any volunteers to create a subgroup and look into the possibilities?"
- ▸ "Let's make a note of this thought and when we review all the items at the end of the day we can prioritize and see how it fits in with other suggestions."

When in Doubt, Park It

One technique that has been useful to trainers through the years is referred to as the parking lot. The parking lot is a large piece of flipchart paper posted on the wall and used to list the ideas offered during the session. An idea that is presented out of sequence or beyond the scope of the agenda is recognized and recorded.

It is very important that you use the parking-lot concept because it encourages people to speak up and provides a rich well of ideas from which you can draw. Some of these ideas may be groundbreakers, but their value is lost to the organization if they are not captured and reinforced. Take a few moments to write down such contributions, no matter how silly they may seem at the time.

This process is also visual proof that the mind works in funny ways. Often people get great ideas about totally different topics at very odd times. It makes sense to take advantage of the creativity when it occurs. Some trainers resist doing this because they believe that pacing the timing to meet the day's agenda shows respect for the goals of the day. True enough, but showing consideration and respect for the individual sends an important message to the group, keeps the juices flowing, and energizes everyone. Exercise 6-1 contains a quick four-question checkup to jog your memory.

Exercise 6-1. Learning to let go.

Use this quick check to jog your memory.

1. Is it difficult for you to admit your foibles to a group of learners?

2. What's the worst thing you fear could happen if you do?

3. What's the advantage or benefit if you do?

4. Briefly sketch out at least one good story you could tell on yourself that may be applicable in a workshop you could envision conducting.
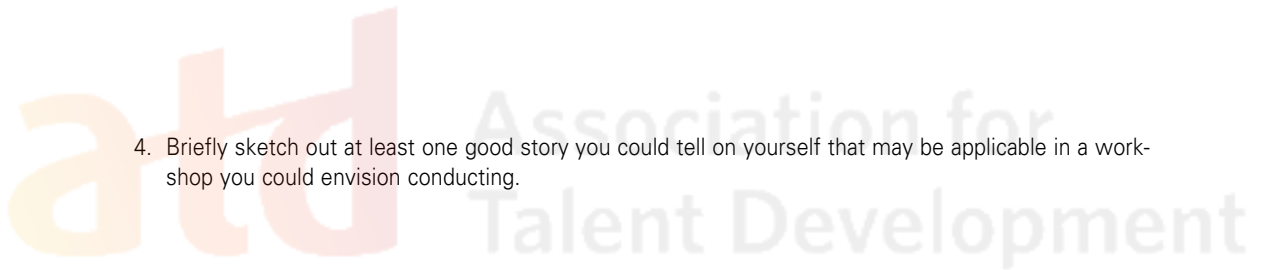
The Quick Check

Admitting your foibles and missteps to a group of learners can make you feel very vulnerable. You might be afraid they'll think less of you or question your competencies. But, if delivered with humor and respect of others, admitting your slip-ups may make others feel more comfortable and more inclined to admit their own.
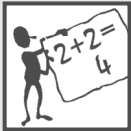
> ## Basic Rule 15
> Use humor sparingly and cautiously.

Some trainers confuse laughter with acquiescence. They think that if the participants are laughing that they are having fun and that participants who are having fun are more inclined to learn the workshop content. Such an assumption is not safe. The key is to encourage participants without embarrassing them in the process. Although it is tempting to use humor, especially in response to off-the-wall suggestions and ideas, doing so is dangerous. Unless the participant is very strong, your attempts at humor may increase that individual's hesitation to participate and may also dampen the willingness of other group members to offer comments.

Use humor with caution. Only a very skillful trainer can use humor without possibly (and unintentionally) being offensive. Use your personal comfort level with the group and personal knowledge of the individuals, their personalities, and work situations as a thermostat for the humor meter.

Cheerleading 101

At times you may find yourself in the role of cheerleader. Some trainers take to this role like ducks take to water, but others don't quite get it. They fail to see that the cheerleader approach works well with certain groups and turns off others. If you are a natural-born cheerleader, you may need to adapt your style to the culture. Do your homework and learn about the participants so that you can cheerlead appropriately and successfully.

Before the session, conduct initial research into what the learners need and—more important—what they expect. Get to know your audience. Here are several ways to become acquainted with your participants:

- ▶ Schedule brief, one-on-one conference calls in advance of the workshop. Ask a few predetermined questions about expectations.

- ▶ Send an email with a few questions so that future attendees can contemplate their training objectives. Request a response and summarize the results to present during the session. Ask permission before you reprint any comments; and to protect the innocent (or not-so-innocent), don't use names. If the responses are sent with a promise of confidentiality, you will probably receive more honest opinions. This upfront, electronic conversation can be a real timesaver if the timeframe or session agenda doesn't allow for an icebreaker exercise.

- ▶ If you have the luxury, one of the best approaches is to have brief 15-minute one-on-one interviews. Sending out the questions via email in advance makes the interview even more efficient. Although you may not be able to interview every potential participant, selecting representative members of the group who represent a cross-section is valuable.

- ▶ Send a questionnaire requesting information; however, today's employees often are overloaded with paperwork. Your questionnaire may grow moldy sitting in their in-boxes.

- ▶ Speak informally to the person(s) requesting the training to identify their objectives for the training experience. It is important to understand there are many customers and some of the most important ones may not be in attendance at the session.

Think About This

If you expect a return of the questionnaire by snail mail, be sure to include a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Offering a fax number at the bottom of the form may also increase the return rates for the completed questionnaires.

The Murky Training Environment

The world of training is suddenly becoming more complex. Working as a training professional can be enlightening, fun, life-changing, and energizing. It can also be frightening, challenging, and frustrating. The unpleasant times are the times when

you can grow professionally. It is these times that provide opportunities for you to overcome personal doubt and develop ways to expand your communication comfort zone. Let's consider, for example, talking.

Using Communication as a One-Way Street

Talking is very easy for some people, and most trainers find that once in front of the group they can get on a roll and go forever. Extroverts usually seem to enjoy the experience more than introverts.

Noted

In general, extroverts talk to process information, and introverts need time and space to think through what has been presented. Keeping that in mind, a moment of silence can be an effective communication experience.

Of course, talking is not always the most effective communication tool; it just happens to fit easily into the traditional vision people have of education and training. People are accustomed to an instructor standing at the front of a room talking to a roomful of people quietly seated in rows and taking notes—the typical classroom scenario. The communication style is simple: Trainers talk, learners listen.

This communication style (primarily one-way) is relatively safe, so long as you are sure the presentation is not offensive to any of the learners and that the information is accurate and relevant. Make certain that the presentation is absolutely on target. Conduct thorough dress rehearsals with peers or friends who can honestly critique your presentation style. Too many trainers end up winging it. They hope that because they have the knowledge and experience they will come up with the right words and the right actions at the right time to work through the session. Perhaps hope springs eternal, but it is not dependable.

For any trainer using this one-way approach, experience in presenting the topic is critical. If you regularly present the same topic to a variety of people, you'll gradually learn when to go for a laugh, when to provoke discussion, and when to pause appropriately.

Using Language Appropriately

Of course, today's business world doesn't always afford trainers the luxury of presenting the same topic on a repetitive basis to various homogenous groups. Training

audiences often are from diverse cultures, different businesses, and different careers, and have a bouquet of value systems. In addition, business operates with a plethora of acronyms and buzzwords. Business language is a moving target, but it must be used accurately, because people will be listening and following your example.

This language, information, and variety overload makes training a challenging business. The days of train-the-trainer sessions have all but disappeared. Everyone is a trainer these days, if only to keep fellow workers current with rapid changes. There are procedural and legal changes, revamping of internal policy due to mergers and buyouts, and more documentation to keep up with the process. Technology has enabled people to create more information more quickly with more details than ever dreamed possible in the past. But, has communication improved?
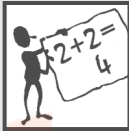
Basic Rule 16
Use common courtesy to make a session valuable to all learners.

Demonstrating Common Courtesy

In today's training climate, participants expect both information and an experience. However, how do you create an experience that benefits everyone and also treats everyone with respect? The variety of expectations and backgrounds comprising a typical training class challenges even the veterans.

What may be helpful are some reminders about basic etiquette that allow you to communicate respect and consideration for every participant. How much time will it take to do the following?

▶ Ask people ahead of time about their preferences.
▶ Welcome the participants and congratulate them for taking the time out of their schedule to attend.
▶ Thank everyone for their participation in advance and encourage engagement. Thank them again at the conclusion.
▶ Let people know their experience is important and that you can learn from them as well.
▶ Request consideration from everyone in the room by keeping comments concise and allowing everyone to express an opinion, even if there is diversity.

▶ Request that you would appreciate it if the participants would assume responsibility for their own comfort, taking quick breaks when necessary.

▶ Plan ahead for those with disabilities or different abilities and make provisions to make sure they feel included rather than excluded. This can be a challenge when you are conducting training in a new environment. Will any of your learners need wheelchairs; first aid provisions; or aids for the sight impaired, colorblind, or hard of hearing?

▶ Avoid making assumptions about the group through your comments. Verify your comments with the group to be sure they are appropriate.

▶ Respect holidays and traditions of other cultures that may need to be factored into scheduling and conducting training.

There are so many ways to be gracious and communicate your desire to receive everyone. Making the effort to be courteous and respectful goes a long way.

Seeing to the Learners' Comfort

Sometimes just stating the obvious can reduce the tension or stress that can result from unmet expectations. One sound idea is to communicate with your learners in advance of a session or right at the beginning of the session with a message like this:

Please prepare mentally and dress appropriately for your own comfort. The temperature may be too warm or too cold, the seats may be too hard or too soft, the sessions and breaks may be too long or too short, the sound may be too loud or too quiet, or the food may be too spicy or too bland for your tastes. Nevertheless, we will attempt to do everything we can to make your experience interesting and beneficial. We will try our best to provide a meaningful learning experience, and your cooperation will be appreciated.

In some circumstances, your learners won't be completely comfortable. In fact, that's the point of some training activities. Outdoor team-building sessions are one example of such a situation. The important thing is that methods and reasoning for the type of exercises are explained at the outset.

In the example given earlier in this chapter, the trainers were not focused on the learners' physical comfort because the objective of the training was to create challenge and explore their responses. If training occurred during pouring rain or freezing

weather, it was all part of the challenge. Of course, the trainers were out there freezing right along with the participants. Above all, the trainers let the participants know that safety was a primary concern. All physical activity was voluntary, and there were other roles available. The trainers also allowed people to help with the process, so that if it were necessary for an individual to opt out of the main activity, that person could still participate.
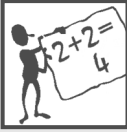
Basic Rule 17
Be positive but realistic in your approach.

Training During Tough Times

When you train, you will likely encounter a variety of people facing a variety of situations. Keeping a positive attitude can go a long way toward giving them an experience they can readily apply in the workplace.

You may be asked to design a training session and the company owners or managers making the request tell you, "Make sure it doesn't turn into a gripe session." This situation usually occurs when the organization is going through some difficulty or another. That type of "request" can be a challenge, depending on the corporate culture and what is actually occurring at the moment. For example, if profits are down and layoffs are eminent, taking a Pollyanna approach would be ludicrous and disrespectful. Although it's obvious that most people don't want to attend a depressing session that is without hope for improving their own situation, it's important to be optimistically realistic.

Then again, in any given group of participants, you will have people at various stages in their lives, experiencing high points and low points. Some may like their present situation, and others may wish things were very different. This mix of people presents a lot for a trainer to deal with when the message being communicated is supposed to apply to everyone. Keep in mind the wise words of Bill Cosby who said, "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody." Despite your best preparation, excellent content, and skilled facilitation, some people will not be happy to be at your session. It's just a fact of life.

You may find yourself in the midst of a training session headed straight down the gripe-session road. Whether it is nonproductive griping or healthy venting depends, at least in part, on you and how you handle it. Depending on the focus of the session, allowing time for a little venting may be psychologically helpful. Issues not identified and addressed will most likely bubble up at a later time. Perhaps it is not your job to resolve those situations in the session you are conducting, but if a sensitive topic arises, acknowledging the reality of that issue for that person at the moment is a powerful way to validate the individual and communicate your support.

Noted

Acknowledging a different point of view is not the same as agreeing with a person's assessment of the situation.

There are many ways to defer or reposition some issues not found on the agenda. Deferring and repositioning are two techniques that can allow the individuals or the group to move past the barrier and proceed to the issue at hand.

Carmen stumbled into a beehive one day. She eventually realized as the day progressed that rumors were circulating through the organization that downsizing was coming. People were concerned about hanging onto their jobs. The focus of the training was to be the introduction of new technology to help the learners improve productivity. This topic created anxiety for some of the people in the group because they feared they were about to be replaced with improved technology.

Carmen saw three options:

▶ Ignore the situation and move on with her topic
▶ Address the issue of downsizing if it appeared
▶ Try to make a silk purse out of what seemed to be a sow's ear by addressing the issue of downsizing directly and showing how the content of the workshop may help ease the situation.

Because she sensed great reluctance in the group to open up and talk (except for those with a great deal of seniority), she decided to take the last option. She pointed out how this session could help everyone in the room because more technology training would benefit everyone personally and professionally regardless of what happened in the organization. The world is rapidly changing, and it makes sense to be prepared to change right along with it.

Her next step was to ask the participants to divide into small groups and discuss the possibilities made available by using the new technology. The size of the groups encouraged more honest discussion and resulted in several long lists of benefits. By making the connection, addressing WIIFM (What's In It For Me?), and allowing people to internalize the benefits, she was able to present the material with support from the group. Once she helped them realize that they could use new skills (regardless of where they worked), the sense of oppression decreased, and people were re-energized by the possibility of learning new skills. Allowing individuals the chance to consider how they could benefit personally created a contagious enthusiasm and turned on the creative juices.

When No One Wants to Change

Not all groups you encounter are as easy to engage in change as Carmen's group was. Some members of a group may be determined to project a negative attitude throughout the session and are only there because it is a stage for them to complain.

By talking to some of those individuals at the breaks, Carmen learned a little more about them personally and identified the issues that were confronting them. Some were on the verge of retirement and really saw no future in technology. They had served their time and were ready to leave the organization. She asked them if they could offer any advice or tips to help some of the newer employees embrace the technology changes. Some were willing to share ideas, others weren't. Nevertheless, she had made the attempt to include them in the learning process for the good of the group.

Micajah has a more direct approach. He learned during his training session that change was in the air. He indicated that he did not know any of the particulars but was aware that the topic was distracting some people in the room. He asked for everyone's cooperation in focusing on the subject at hand to maximize everyone's time. Although he was sensitive to the current situation, he was not equipped to deal with a different topic.

Whether your approach would be closer to Micajah's or to Carmen's is not as crucial as your need to address—in some way—the issues bubbling beneath the surface. Once again, it is clarity of communication that can help keep the training session on track, but there are options of style. You've probably heard the phrase "It's not so much what you say but how you say it." Showing that you care isn't something that can be faked. It is time to answer one of those tough questions again:

"What is your true motive?" Is it about perpetuating learning for your audience? Is it for you to look good, or is it to facilitate the transfer of knowledge?

Generally an appropriate attitude on your part is reciprocated with an appropriate response from the group. You have the opportunity and the power to create a positive experience for everyone—including yourself.

Getting It Done

You've spent some time in this chapter learning about setting the tone for your training session. You've also discovered different ways to show respect for the participants. Now take some time to answer the questions in exercise 6-2.

Exercise 6-2. Communication—applied!

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

1. What do you usually do to set the tone in your workshops?

2. Are there things you have done in the past that you are thinking about changing? If so, what?

3. List two tips gleaned from this chapter that you anticipate putting to use.

Many trainers misconstrue the need to communicate on an authentic level by thinking that means they must always be open to talking, listening, and communicating. Nothing could be further from the truth. True communication cannot occur unless both people have a clear idea of who they are and of their own limits. That internalized idea is called a boundary. Chapter 7 will show you how to identify and set your own boundaries so that you can be more effective as you train.

Boundaries

- -

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll learn:

▶ The importance of boundaries
▶ How to set boundaries in a training setting
▶ How to use personal power to set boundaries.

A boundary is anything that marks a limit. We all have limits of different kinds at various times. Some of us have great tolerance and believe that other people know when it's appropriate to self-correct. Others prefer to be in control most of the time.
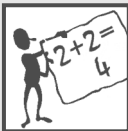
Basic Rule 18
Deciding when and where to set the boundaries is like drawing a line in the sand!

How to Set Boundaries

Boundaries are important because every training session needs limits—what will be allowed, what will not. The easiest way to communicate boundaries is to state them at the beginning of a session through written communication, visual aids, or a conversation with your participants. Every trainer needs to know how to set boundaries.

Timing Is Everything

Cliff was conducting a one-day seminar for a nonprofit board. The objective was to help welcome new members and facilitate the transition of the board to the next level of involvement. An activity was planned to boost the energy level after lunch and help welcome new members into the group in a positive, playful way. The energy in the group was rising as the trainers presented their visual aids. Suddenly, a few of the past officers stood up and indicated they felt the group was wasting time. They wanted to rewrite the mission statement themselves and get immediately in groups to plan their goals for the year.

At that point Cliff indicated it was time for a break. During the break, he quickly gathered some feedback and then moved the group to goal-setting activities. Later in the day there was feedback from one of the outgoing officers that he thought Cliff had lost control of the group.

Another way to view the situation, however, was that an open environment for feedback had been created. Although it would have been easy to take the comments from the outgoing officers personally, he focused instead on the new members of the group who might have felt intimidated by the nature of the task-driven afternoon activities. New members might have felt they would have little to contribute to the workshop. This was a question of boundary setting for Cliff. Had Cliff had a strong need to feel in control, the situation could have been devastating. Rather, Cliff focused on meeting the seminar objectives for the day on a timely basis by ensuring the participants felt open to express their opinions in a safe environment.

Timing has a great deal to do with effective boundary setting. Knowing when to let go and when to tighten up is a great skill. Learning when to push people to their limit and when to let them push themselves is an art.

Using Encouragement

Learning occurs primarily through communication: verbal, nonverbal, symbolic, and experiential. Verbally encouraging someone to move forward and to keep going can be a very powerful way to create a motivational environment. "Keep it up," "You

can do it," or "Keep up the good work" can be highly motivational to many people. Cheerleading in this way can really work. A standing ovation or a real or figurative pat on the back can work wonders when energy is low or tension is high. We often underestimate the value of words spoken sincerely. Just a simple "thank you" can work miracles sometimes.

How do these brief phrases set boundaries? Very quickly they reward the behaviors and become a model for the group in positive way. Other words of encouragement include such statements as "We appreciate your involvement. Without active participation, we wouldn't be able to progress through the main points of this session."

In this way, limits can be established just by making a positive comment or speaking words of encouragement. As a trainer, it is important to keep the kudos evenly spread around the group. Look for the positive things people do and let them know the effort was noticed and important.

Priority-Setting Activities

Grading or ranking individual contributions in a group setting can be a way of setting limits or boundaries. We are all used to these types of activities from our educational experiences. However, drawing comparisons of different people's actions in the group using rankings, ratings, and grading can generate internal competition. Be sure that a competitive environment is what you really want, and ask yourself if you would be perpetuating the right kind of learning. In addition, be sure any grading you do also promotes the results you have set as objectives. By using grades or rankings carefully, you can help the group achieve its desired results and promote friendly, healthy competition.

What Are Your Boundaries?

It is wise to start with yourself to set your own boundaries. Exercise 7-1 can help you think about your personal standards. Take a few minutes to answer the questions and analyze your own feelings about boundaries. Of course, there are no "correct" answers; these questions are meant to be thought provoking.

Exploring Your Answers

So, how are you doing? Let's explore the questions a little deeper:

▶ *Over the edge?* Your hot button may be missing materials, poor service from the facility where you are training, technology that doesn't work, or a lack of amenities that make for a good learning environment (uncomfortable

Exercise 7-1. Setting your own boundaries.

1. What behaviors from others, figuratively and emotionally, drive me over the edge? _____
   _____
   _____

2. What parts of training truly wear me down?_____
   _____
   _____

3. How am I prepared to respond if my boundaries are violated? _____
   _____
   _____

4. How will I know my boundaries have been violated? _____
   _____
   _____

5. What can I say to regain my composure? _____
   _____
   _____

6. What are some triggers that will let me know I am on the edge? _____
   _____
   _____

7. What assertive statements can I make to maintain my boundaries? _____
   _____
   _____

8. When and how should I seek feedback to see if I am overstepping others' boundaries?
   _____
   _____
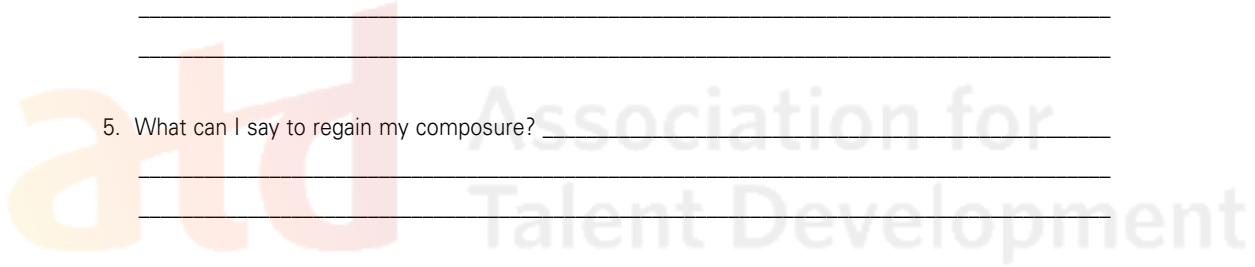
9. What can I say or do to show respect for others' boundaries? _____

    _____

    _____

10. How can I mend fences and emotionally resolve discrepancies? _____

    _____

    _____

---

seating, missing or poor-quality food and beverages, a room that's too cold or too hot). Or, perhaps your hot button is pushed by participants who are grandstanding, complaining, or whining. Go ahead and add to the list. What really drives you crazy or makes your blood pressure rise?

▶ *Worn down?* On top of some of the items you've already mentioned, think about some circumstances that wear you down and sap your energy. On top of lack of sleep may be improper nourishment, the sessions when you end up doing most of the talking, or the sessions where the participants do all the talking. List your energy drainers.

▶ *Boundaries violated?* Do you have the "I wish I had said . . ." syndrome? The perfect one-liners always seem to come a day late. The next day you think of the perfect response to the comment that was dropped on you like a bomb. Perhaps you didn't even see it coming. You didn't even realize your boundaries were being violated.

▶ *Stepping over the line?* Did you notice someone stepped over your line? Maybe you didn't even realize your boundaries were violated until someone mentioned it to you later. Maybe you just felt a tinge of embarrassment and hoped no one would notice. Maybe you had *that* feeling in the pit of your stomach.

▶ *Verbal dings?* What can you do about verbal dings? The comments may not even be directed toward you but to a group of people or another person. Do you let it go?

▶ *Triggers?* Do you know your triggers? What are your hot buttons? What rattles you or shakes your composure? What is your greatest fear about your reaction? If you don't know your triggers, then you will not be able to avoid triggering situations.

- *Accepting of others' boundaries?* What can you do? How do you move on? Do you acknowledge or do you ignore? It's helpful to be straightforward when dealing with boundaries. Ignoring them only attempts to sweep things under the rug, and they can come back to haunt you.

- *Attitude toward feedback?* For a while, giving feedback was a euphemism for being critical but not taking responsibility for the results. Trainers, though, were (and are) expected to be able to take feedback without taking offense. To do this, you have to depersonalize what you do and realize that your goal is to keep the process moving forward toward a positive outcome. Within this discussion of boundaries, when someone gives you feedback, it may mean you have stepped over his or her boundary line. Are you up to the personal challenge of growing and learning?

- *Respectful of others?* How do you show consideration to others? What should you say? How can you be sensitive to others needs? Most often, if you show respect you'll get respect in return.

- *Building bridges?* How can we build bridges? What can be said or what actions can be taken to see the other person's point of view?

A Caveat

This exercise gave you the opportunity to vent a little and then think about what you can do or say to remain centered. By nature, most trainers are giving people. Sometimes, that desire to give gets in our way. We often want to give to others so much that we aren't sure how to set boundaries for ourselves and we are unaware of others' boundaries.
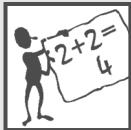
Basic Rule 19

Building bridges takes strong pillars on all sides and equal partners to bear the weight.

Celeste was a people pleaser. She would do anything to avoid conflict and truly wanted to help people grow and learn. She had great difficulty saying no to people because she wanted to make them happy and create an upbeat training experience for all who attended her sessions.

As a new trainer for a pharmaceutical manufacturer, she found herself being introduced at various meetings to the different managers and workgroups. She was anxious to begin her training programs and to see if she could make a difference in the company. At one of her first meetings, she arrived early and sat in one of the chairs at the boardroom table. As people entered and seated themselves at the table, one of the managers, Mitch, rushed in and looked directly at Celeste and said in a strong voice, "Hey, Celeste, you're in my chair!" Celeste looked around the room to see if there were any smiles because she thought this might be a new employee joke. No one was smiling, so Celeste said, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize this was your chair." She immediately rose and moved to another seat.

The next week Celeste was talking with a few people and learned that Mitch was used to getting what he wanted when he wanted it. She realized after a time that Mitch didn't have a particular chair. His comment the week before was just a way for him to establish his control. He had a great deal of seniority and an entire department that reported to him. Being the new kid on the block, Celeste felt powerless and as though her boundaries had been violated. At first, she was angry at herself for not responding to Mitch the day he confronted her in the meeting. To make matters a little worse, when she shared the incident with her peers, they had plenty of ideas about what she should have said to Mitch.

Celeste realized she had to set some boundaries early with Mitch or he would probably continue to cross that line in the sand—her personal boundary. She realized she couldn't become an adversary because she was going to have to work with Mitch for a long time. How could she start over and establish a more positive relationship?

By building bridges, strong teams can accomplish unbelievable goals. So Celeste decided to develop a strategy to win over Mitch as an ally. Celeste figured she would first have a one-on-one talk with Mitch and try to learn what was important to him and how she might be able to provide him support. After listening to his challenges with his job, she proposed a training session that might alleviate some of the problems he was encountering. She asked for his assistance in the design of the program and made sure the training objectives matched his concerns. Although through her position in the company she wasn't able to solve all his problems, she presented herself as an assertive person demonstrating her personal power with a can-do attitude.

Boundaries Have Two Sides

What may be perceived as an important boundary to you may be viewed as a barrier to someone else. That's where the conflicts can arise. Setting boundaries is much like a dance. Sometimes you step back and sometimes you step forward and often to the side. Unfortunately, there are no definite rules to follow.

One of the important things about boundaries to remember is what is negotiable and what isn't. When one department congregated for an outdoor team-building session, there was a participant—Jacque—who made it clear that he considered outdoor team-building activities a waste of time. And, it was apparent to anyone within earshot exactly what his opinion was. Ricardo was in a bit of a quandary because the president of the company had indicated in an all-employee meeting that the training was mandatory.

Ricardo took Jacque aside to listen to his issues and concerns. He then offered a few alternatives about his level of participation. One alternative Ricardo presented was that Jacque could be an observer if he were uncomfortable actually participating in the activities. Jacque was still adamant that he still did not want to go through this training. Out of respect for Jacque's deep passion about not participating and concern for how his behavior might affect the outcome of the day, Ricardo gave him the option to return to work. Jacque took the option and drove for an hour and a half back to work. The team-building group had a very successful day. In this case, there were many boundaries respected.

First, Ricardo respected Jacque's boundaries. He was an unwilling participant who felt that he could not take the time for this exercise. Ricardo knew that Jacque would have to deal with any consequences of his decision back at the workplace. By allowing him to leave, Ricardo respected Jacque's beliefs about the importance of his time and how to spend it that day.

In addition, the boundaries of the participants were maintained. Had Ricardo forced Jacque to remain, his outward recalcitrance could have diminished the learning experience for the other participants. Jacque had a history of being confrontational and negative about many practices in the company. Forcing people like Jacque beyond certain thresholds can end up being unproductive for all concerned.

Finally, Ricardo's boundaries as a trainer were not stretched because he had discussed the possible scenario with his co-trainers on site in advance. Ricardo had made a decision early that he would offer reluctant participants a choice because he believed it was not his responsibility to be accountable for other employees' behavior.

Noted

Prepare for the unexpected and have a back-up plan ready to act upon. You probably feel the same way as many people do: There just aren't enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you need to do, much less what you might like to do. You may find in your rush to get to the next meeting or project that you have to take the time to slow down, take a deep breath, and plan for a surprise. You can benefit by identifying in advance some responses to use in the event that your boundaries or those of other people are violated. The nature of your back-up plan likely will depend on who you are, your personality, habits, and customs.

Using "I" Statements

One way to redraw the line when you feel your boundaries are being violated is to use an "I" statement. An "I" statement has a minimum of three major components:

1. State your feelings.
2. Describe the violating behavior in objective terms.
3. Propose an alternative behavior that would be your preference.

The "I" statement is not new; it has been around for a long time. It's easy to use and can be extremely helpful when you find yourself in crisis mode. Much has been written about the power of "I" statements. (See, for example, Amodeo and Wentworth, 1995). The "I" statement can be said in a calm manner and in various sequences, but the basic formula looks like this:

When you _____ ,
[describe behavior in objective, neutral terms]
I feel _____ . I would prefer it in the future
[describe how you feel, not what you think]
if you would _____ .
[describe at least one alternative behavior in objective terms]

Look at these examples:

▸ When you criticize my work in an email that goes to several other staff
members, I feel bullied and intimidated. In the future, I would prefer it if we

could discuss your concerns about the quality of my efforts in private, so that we can work toward a better solution.

▶ When you consistently arrive late for our meetings, I feel that you do not take our effort seriously. In the future, I would prefer that you arrive on time.

Such a very succinct, assertive statement can go a long way in letting others know your boundaries. Often people step over the line without even realizing they are violating someone else's boundary. Trainers who are learning to set personal boundaries often find the "I" message to be one of the most powerful approaches to take.

The recipient of an "I" message may respond in several different ways—anger, hurt, defensiveness, shock, or maybe even acceptance of the validity of your comments. Whatever the response, you are not responsible for another person's behavior. Expressing your sincere feelings in a way that is not hurtful can open a dialog and begin building a bridge.

The next most important part of this communication process is to remain silent after you have stated your preferences and feelings. Continuing to expand or provide details only clutters the initial statement. It is often helpful for people to write down what you want to say in advance. Rehearsing how you will say the "I" statement will help you feel more comfortable and personally powerful.

Once you have made this statement, it is up to you to decide if the relationship is worth building or keeping. Most people want to meet you halfway by sharing their concerns and their personal barriers. Just making an "I" statement doesn't always do the trick, though. You'll need to change your behavior if the other person refuses to change.

Take Eugene, for example. The training session he was facilitating seemed to be getting out of control; time was running short. He opted after the next break to start off with an "I" statement to the group. He said, "I have a growing concern we are getting behind schedule with this session, and there are some very important topics we still need to cover before the end of the day. I would appreciate it if you could all help me by monitoring the time, keeping your comments brief, and helping us keep on pace so we can be sure to cover the priorities today."

People generally are courteous enough to accommodate such requests. By making an "I" statement to the group, you have invited the participants to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

With this group, though, Eugene had more difficulty than usual. He had to address the same issue using a differently worded "I" statement later. What he added was that it would be necessary to shorten the lunch break to make up for lost time. His professionally worded statement delivered in a nonjudgmental way helped the group become more focused for the remainder of the day.
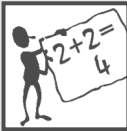
Basic Rule 20
Disruptive behavior may be a symptom of underlying serious issues.

Handling Difficult Situations

There's at least one in every group: a participant who loves to whine, become combative, talk nonstop, or set himself or herself up as an overeager superstar. Unfortunately, these disruptive behaviors can inhibit the flow and process of the training session. Sometimes people exhibiting these challenging behaviors have their own agendas and are using this training environment as a safe place to vent and make their point. This is where finesse as a facilitator is important. Even though it may not be comfortable for you, you'll need to use top-notch communication skills for the sake of the entire group.

Intervention of some type on your part is generally needed to stop the disruptions and maintain the schedule. Some ways to reset boundaries and get the session back on track include the following:

▶ Take a break. That way, everyone gets to take a breather, step back, and reflect on the source of the tension. When everyone returns, you can start on a new topic. It can also give you an opportunity to talk in private to the individual dominating the conversation and discuss other ways that he or she be heard on these points outside of the forum.

▶ Turn the conversation to the group for feedback and attempt to redirect the conversation to another topic.

▶ Thank the speaker for his or her comments and then move on to another topic with another person in the group.

▶ Guard against engaging in a one-on-one debate with a person in the room who is overly verbal. Use your visual aids as a nonverbal way to move the group on to the next topic.

▶ Break up into small groups and select different spokespeople to present collective findings.

How do such actions help set boundaries? By diverting attention you can keep the process moving and not be sidetracked by participants with other agendas. Politely and briefly acknowledge the person who is speaking but keep moving.

Subsequent chapters on listening and nonverbal behavior present some other, more specific communication tools that can help you set boundaries. But, at some point, you will run out of alternatives and have to use that very powerful word *no.* If you are dealing with a non-negotiable issue, it is important you have the word available. There are other ways to phrase the same message, such as, "I'm very sorry; however, we are unable to assist you at this time." Or, "We appreciate your concern and will look into some alternatives and get back to you once we've had time to research the options." To maintain credibility be sure to follow up and get back to the person if you make such a promise. By communicating in a calm and thought-out manner, you can assertively set boundaries and respect the boundaries of others at the same time.

Getting It Done

Use the questions in exercise 7-2 as a basis for identifying your hot-button issues and formulate some advance plans to maintain your boundaries.

Exercise 7-2. Clarifying boundaries.

Contemplate your answers to the following questions:

1. What have you learned about your trigger points?

2. What are some of the behaviors you have decided to adopt to counteract your hot-button situations?

3. List the boundaries you wish to work on setting in your sessions as a trainer.

4. Complete at least two "I" statements in writing to assert your boundaries for future training sessions.

This chapter has shown you many ways to establish boundaries so that the training experience can be most effective for everyone. Sometimes when inexperienced trainers identify (or clarify) their boundaries, their manner is inhibiting rather than reassuring. It's important to be able to establish your authority without being autocratic or overbearing. Chapter 8 will show you how to do that.

8

Trainer as Guru

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll see:

▶ How to communicate authority, not autocracy
▶ How to let participants know you respect them
▶ What to say when you don't know the answer.

Have you ever heard a trainer say that he or she loves the challenge of getting hit with some big surprise that causes a major change in the structure or timing of a training session? Probably not. Just the idea of flipping the switch on an overhead projector to find that absolutely nothing happens is enough to give most trainers heartburn. Or, how about the time when twice as many people showed up for a session as were expected because someone misplaced half of the registration forms? What about the flush that rises to a trainer's cheeks when a participant makes an off-color comment and the room goes absolutely silent? Every trainer has experienced that feeling in the pit of the stomach when someone throws a curve question for which there is no ready answer.

Effective, experienced trainers handle these diversions with respect and aplomb (at least on the surface). The others don't.

Communicating Authority

Kenji strode into the training room. He was 15 minutes early and well prepared. After placing his supplies on the table, he wandered over to the coffee table, poured a cup, and gave the room a satisfied glance. It was set up just the way he liked it. Soon, the participants began filtering in, and the session was ready to begin.

For the most part, the morning went well. Kenji skillfully steered the group through the mini-lectures, assessments, group discussions, and activities. His timing was flawless, and he masterfully closed down some extraneous discussions, keeping the group on task. He loved the feeling of accomplishment that came from a completed workshop. He was definitely on a roll, and the workshop wrapped up right on schedule.

Later, Paul, his boss, asked Kenji to stop by for a minute. When Kenji walked into the office, Paul was reading the evaluations. "Kenji, did you have a chance to look at these?" Paul didn't look or sound pleased.

"Well, not really," replied Kenji. "I had a couple of meetings in the afternoon, so I thought I'd get to them later, why?"

"I think you'd better take a look and then get back with me. I'd like to know what you think."

Somewhat mystified, Kenji took the stack of evaluations back to his office. As he read through them, he grew irritated. "Doesn't listen to the participants." "Doesn't seem to respect us." "Doesn't answer questions." "Doesn't give us enough time to respond." "Spent too much time looking at his watch."

But, the worst was yet to come. Near the end of the evaluation form appeared the question, "Would you recommend this workshop to others in your department?" Seventy-five percent of the participants had responded no.

Kenji angrily threw the papers on his desk. "That's the thanks I get for making sure they get to lunch on time. You'd think they'd appreciate the extra 10 minutes of free time."

Kenji is an autocratic trainer. He has confused having authority with maintaining unyielding control; consequently, he rides roughshod over the learners in his sessions.

If he could go back and take a look at a video of his session, he would see that he cut off the participants' questions, used sarcasm instead of humor, cut the break

short, and—yes—kept looking at his watch. In short, many of Kenji's actions and mannerisms communicated quite clearly that he was in the driver's seat and that the others were just along for the ride.

You can identify a trainer who is probably locked into being autocratic when you see or hear

▶ lack of listening behavior

▶ impatient nodding when participants are talking

▶ a tendency to hurry along the participants and to rush small-group exercises

▶ a slavish devotion to keeping on task

▶ sarcasm or humor at the expense of others

▶ more time allotted to mini-lecture and explanation than allotted to learner interaction and processing of small-group results

▶ little real consideration of learners' suggestions or comments that expand on the content

▶ a tendency to take offense or put down a comment that seems to challenge or contradict the validity of what the trainer is presenting.

On the surface, an autocratic trainer seems to be in charge and confident. In actuality, any trainer who hides behind autocratic behavior is at some deeper level running scared. This trainer is *not* communicating confidence, but is communicating fear.
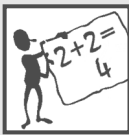
Basic Rule 21
Authority and autocracy are not the same thing.

Conversely, a trainer who has real authority is able to flex as needed to suit the needs of the participants. This trainer communicates confidence by exhibiting the following types of behaviors:

▶ authentic listening to trainee comments and questions.

▶ respectful steering of the discussion back to the topic or moving the group on by saying something like, "These comments are interesting. I'd like to spend more time with them, but I feel the need to move forward right now. We can discuss it more at the break if you like."

▸ willingness (and ability) to discard a task or shorten a segment if another issue is more important.

▸ humor that's inclusive and increases the sense of "We're all in this thing together."

▸ allocation of proportionately more time to small-group interaction and processing of results than to mini-lecture or explanations.

▸ openness to introduction of new information by viewing it as enhancing rather than challenging to the workshop content.

▸ willingness to say, "I don't know right now. That's an important point. Let me find out, and I'll get back to you."

Check Your Comfort Level

How about you? How comfortable are you when you don't know the answer? How flexible can you be in a workshop setting and still get the job done? Before going any further into the content for this chapter, why not take a few minutes to complete exercise 8-1? Then check the explanations that appear in the sections to follow. You may learn some things that you can put to work on the job tomorrow.

Your answers to the questions in exercise 8-1 can tell you a great deal about your underlying motivations. Check out the explanations, then reflect on your answers and see if there is something you may want to do differently.

When You Don't Know the Answer

No one can know everything; no one is a walking encyclopedia. Yet for some reason, most people think as soon as they put themselves in front of a group of people that they *should* know all the answers. Not so. Participants respect trainers who can say with humility but without embarrassment, "I don't know, but I'll find out and get back to you." It's even better if you can compliment the person for coming up with a really interesting question—one that you can't wait to research. Of course, once you promise to follow up, you *must* do so. Nothing builds trust like being trustworthy.

What about the person who can make up an answer on the fly? After all, probably no one will know the difference. This approach presents at least two problems. First, although it may make things flow more smoothly at first, the truth does come out sometimes and that kind of spillover has a tendency to be embarrassing. Gaining a reputation for saying the first thing that pops into your mind is not desirable,

Exercise 8-1. Learning and training: a responsibility checkup.

Circle the answer the feels the most like you.

1. When I don't know an answer, I:

    A. Make one up quickly. Who's going to know the difference?

    B. Say, "I don't know," and change the subject.

    C. Feel slightly embarrassed, as if I should know.

    D. Say, "I don't know, but I'll find out and get back to you."

2. Who is responsible for the learning that takes place in an adult educational setting?

    A. The trainer, who sets up the learning experience.

    B. The participant, who is there to learn.

    C. Both the trainer and the participant.

3. What's the most effective approach for a trainer to take in a workshop?

    A. Be in control and make sure that participants know it.

    B. Maintain the flow but soft-pedal the control.

    C. Maintain a loose agenda but go where the group needs to go.

4. Concerning content in a workshop:

    A. The trainer is supposed to be fully versed in the content, and related content.

    B. The trainer is supposed to know the content to be presented, and know where to find related content.

    C. The trainer should be familiar with the content, however may rely on experts in the group.

5. When I am up in front of a group presenting a training session, I feel:

    A. Powerful, like a strong leader.

    B. Slightly vulnerable, as though some people may be out to get me.

    C. Like a coach or partner.

    D. Aggressive and goal-oriented: I know what I'm doing and will lead this group to the end of the workshop.

6. When someone challenges my content during a training session, I feel:

    A. Defensive: I'm the one who's studied this stuff.

    B. Embarrassed: I should know this stuff.

    C. Surprised: I'll check it out later and find out.

    D. No impact: Some people just like to show off.

professionally or personally. Second, giving an answer just to fill a void or avoid feeling inadequate for a moment leads to a feeling of disingenuousness that can be transmitted to the learners or undermine *your own* confidence every time you do it. It's better to bite the bullet, admit you don't know, and make a commitment to find out.

Responsibility for Learning

The best answer is *C.* Avoid the tendency to shuck the responsibility for the learning or to take on all the responsibility. The best trainers are not sages or gurus but coaches—partners in learning with the participants. By partnering with your learners, you can avoid the temptation to open their heads and pour in knowledge, and they can avoid the temptation to view your workshop as a mini-vacation from their jobs.

Remember, you and the training participant are really two points of an equilateral triangle. On the other point sits the manager who has freed up this employee's time so that something beneficial can happen for both the individual and the department. It's likely that others are taking up the slack during the participant's absence from the office. Therefore, both of you have a responsibility to provide the manager with a good return on the investment.

The Most Effective Training Approach

Item 3 of exercise 8-1 is a little tricky: The right answer is, "It depends." It depends on the content, the training arena, and the purpose of the day. If you happen to be training in emergency skills or something dangerous, then you'd better be in control, and everyone needs to acknowledge that you are. On the other hand, in most training situations, it's optimal to manage the flow but go easy on the controlling behaviors. It's always possible to shorten a segment or occasionally eliminate part of the workshop in order to improve the learning.

Maintaining a loose agenda but going where the group needs to go is appropriate if you are facing a situation like the one Laura faced in chapter 5. It makes no sense to doggedly pursue a workshop design that clearly is inappropriate for the group. Doing so communicates a deep lack of respect for the participants. You will only succeed in alienating them, wasting their time, and ruining your chances for working with them again. It takes some guts and no small amount of experience, but rearranging a workshop on the spot can have great rewards for everyone in attendance.

Content in a Workshop

Again, don't paint yourself into a corner by expecting to be a content guru. If you are a training generalist, it is virtually impossible to be a subject matter expert in every workshop you lead. You may be conducting a workshop on communication skills one day and quality process the next. Show that you respect the people and build their confidence in you by knowing the content you are to present while also knowing where to find answers that extend beyond the scope of that workshop.

How You Feel in Front of a Group

When you're at the front of the classroom presenting a training session, that's where the rubber meets the road. Based on previous answers, you already know that the best answer is *C.* But what's the matter with the alternative responses?

Power, aggression, and goal orientation all have their appropriate places in the training classroom, but they get in the way when they become habitual or addictive. You don't want to be "like" a strong leader, you want to lead with strength. The strongest leaders are coaches because they create strength in others. (Remember Bear Bryant and Vince Lombardi?)

Feeling slightly vulnerable is no incurable disease either. Every trainer feels that way from time to time. The key is knowing how to connect with the participants so that you create an "us" feeling, rather than an "us and them" feeling. Use the communication skills taught in other chapters in this book to build connections and you won't feel like they're out to get you.

Dealing With a Participant's Challenge

The best answer is *C.* When someone throws you a curve, it's natural to feel some surprise; your heart may race for a moment. But remember, one of your goals is to engender confidence in your participants. If they have no confidence in you, why should they pay any attention at all to what you say? Assuming there's value in your content, you have to build their confidence in you. Becoming defensive won't help, and neither will a feeling of embarrassment or shame. You're not expected to know everything, and you don't want to communicate by your behavior that you have just made a horrendous mistake by not being omniscient.

On the other hand, if you are unaffected by a participant's challenge, then you are indicating a lack of respect for the learners and their time. Even if the person who

Noted

Attempting to be a guru may be an exhausting undertaking. Being well prepared and checking your resources on a regular basis can keep you on track with current trends and new developments.

brought up the question was trying to show off or put you down, take the high road. It's appropriate to feel something— at least some degree of surprise—and then to take the responsibility for tracking down the correct information.

Where to Go From Here?

The all-knowing guru image is very appealing. In fact, throughout their careers, otherwise competent trainers must fight this temptation constantly. Don't expect to outgrow this tendency completely. Everyone wants to feel as though he or she has something to offer, but it is important to remember that content, though obviously meaningful, is only the beginning.

Even if you are a newcomer to the training arena, you have much to offer your participants. The catch is that *your gifts to them are realized only if you teach them how to find the answers for themselves.* You won't be around to feed them the information they need when they are back on the job. By communicating through your words and behavior your willingness to appear somewhat vulnerable and prone to universal human foibles, you create strength in yourself and the participants. It's a teaching paradox.

Getting It Done

You've read in this chapter about the dangers of falling into an autocratic role rather than an authoritative role, and you've also seen how you can turn your human vulnerabilities into training strengths. As you respond to the questions in exercise 8-2, think about how you can apply your newfound knowledge in your workshops.

Exercise 8-2. Application and reflection.

Take a few moments to reflect on the questions below.

1. Have you ever felt that your learners were trying to force you into the role of omniscient guru?

2. Why do you think that occurs?

3. List two things you have learned in this chapter that you can put to use immediately.

Now that you know it is possible to be authoritative without being autocratic, turn to chapter 9. It presents many ways that you can use the art of listening to strengthen your position of personal power and authority within a group.

Listening Is an Art

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll learn about:

▶ Five levels of listening
▶ Communication stoppers to avoid
▶ Statements that encourage clarification
▶ Ways to use empathic listening to defuse some training situations.

Joan always thought she was a fairly good listener. (After all, as a trainer, she engaged in two-way conversation almost all the time.) Her perception changed, though, when she attended a listening workshop. Joan experienced an uncomfortable paradigm shift about the act of listening. She learned, for example that her mental picture of someone who was "listening" was very stereotypical—looking attentively at the speaker, maintaining eye contact, and occasionally nodding.

Joan was embarrassed to think how often she did these things automatically, without a clue about the true intent of the conversation. What really saddened her was to realize how many times she had presented a workshop, looked out on a sea

of faces, and saw the same "attentive" look (blank stare). Her participants probably neither understood what she was saying nor how it could possibly apply to them. This realization was very discouraging. Joan had depended on her training skills and experience for most of her career, and now she saw that it was possible that very few people were listening, much less understanding, anything she was trying to pass on.

If a Tree Falls

The old question tossed around by philosophy students still applies: "If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?" The point is that listening is a two-way encounter. But, just because you are speaking and the people in the group *appear* to be attentive doesn't mean they are truly listening. They even make appropriate, polite, nonverbal gestures to indicate that they understand you.

The question then becomes what message are they hearing? How are they interpreting the comments you make? Is it possible that someone could pick out a message that you did not intend to send? In short, did they really get the point?

Present and Observe

When you start a training session, you have certain objectives to accomplish. One way to help ensure that you will reach those objectives is to read your audience and then determine whether you need to change your behavior or your content mid-workshop. To do that, you must be able to present *and* observe at the same time.

This skill combination is not something that an inexperienced trainer will be able to do quickly. Simultaneous presentation and observation is a skill that develops over time. But, eventually you must learn to remain focused on the content, the delivery, and the audience and adapt appropriately if need be.

The good news is that some observation can be done beforehand. For example, as a trainer, it is important that you set up the room and materials in advance. Doing so allows you the opportunity to be available to listen and chat with participants as they arrive. This informal observation and casual conversation can yield valuable insight into what each of the participants is feeling or experiencing that day. As you walk around the room, you may find out that someone is not feeling well, that another has been up all night working the late shift, or that another has a new baby at home and is deprived of sleep because of late-night feedings.

Use this information to help you position your session. Perhaps you could acknowledge that because there are some tired people in the group (without mentioning names) you'll make a special effort to keep the session upbeat and interesting. This small kindness is a gesture that can reach out to your participants, acknowledge their needs, and empathize with them, but without embarrassing anyone. When you take the time to focus on the people in your group, you are connecting with them. Skilled listening can help, too.

Five Levels of Listening

Communication is a complex process that involves different levels of listening (table 9-1). The table starts with the most basic nonverbal behaviors and evolves to high-level behaviors that signify a more intense, meaningful level of listening and connecting.

Learn these descriptions of listening types, and then begin to play a little game on your own. Take a few moments each day—just a few—and try to recall when you have used any of the listening styles on the list, perhaps during a recent workshop when you were a trainer or a learner or just in a prolonged conversation. Did you demonstrate or observe any of the listening behaviors listed in table 9-1? Once you've

Table 9-1. The five levels of listening.

Level of Listening	Characteristics
Passive Listening	Demonstrating nonverbal behaviors such as affirmative head nodding, eye contact, note taking, smiling, or presenting a thinking pose at appropriate moments
Listening for Knowledge	Listening first for facts and logic and then mentally listing things in a sequence or pattern to form conclusions
Active Listening	Demonstrating appropriate nonverbal behaviors that are responsive to questions posed or asking questions to increase understanding
Listening for Clarification	Paraphrasing and replaying in different words to help the listeners increase their understanding of the previous comments and dialog
Empathic Listening	Identifying feelings by confirming with the listener if your intuition about his or her feelings is correct

Noted

Most people when asked would say they are good listeners. However, many do not realize listening is a multidimensional skill that draws upon nonverbal and verbal communication.

identified the styles you've used, ask yourself if the encounter could have gone better if you had used a different type of listening. The point of this daily reflection is that merely learning communication techniques is wasted effort if you don't apply them. Furthermore, you can't really teach or model what you cannot apply.

Decoding Listening Messages

Any of these listening types can be appropriate under particular circumstances. Let's go through them and see how you might interpret and respond.

Passive Listening

For starters, it really isn't passive. The name implies that the responses from the listener are not active. There may actually be conversation in a limited way.

Here's a typical scenario: Things were not going well. Enrique from HR had just come out of yet another staff meeting during which it was announced that positions were going to be cut and that everyone would have to assume additional duties. Of course, there was no more pay even though there would be additional hours. Enrique was already working a 45-hour week. Now it looked as though that would grow by at least another five hours.

As he walked down the hallway, absorbed in his thoughts, he heard, "Hey, Enrique! How are you doing today?" It was his friend from engineering, Carl.

Enrique replied with a weak smile and said, "Fine!" He hoped to keep moving so he wouldn't have to elaborate. Before he could continue down the hall, Carl exuberantly announced that he had just been promoted and began to tell Enrique all the details.

Enrique found himself stammering. "Uh, congratulations. It couldn't happen to a more deserving person!" He pasted a wider smile on his face and shook Carl's hand with enthusiasm. Although Carl looked a little confused, Enrique could say nothing else.

Was Enrique's response appropriate? Why not delve deeper into the situation, get into a more in-depth discussion? Why not tell Carl what had just transpired in the staff meeting? Enrique chose instead to say nothing about his own situation.

Some people believe that if you don't tell all, then you are setting up barriers or not being truthful. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. The reality is that Carl chose to say "How are you?" as an opener, a chance to engage Enrique in conversation. He was feeling extremely happy and wanted to share his good news with a friend. Enrique didn't want to rain on Carl's parade, so he chose to do the minimum—momentary eye contact, a brief smile, and a short but pleasant response. His response suited everyone's needs at the moment. He was listening and responding passively.

There could, of course, have been other complications. Perhaps although Enrique was friendly with Carl, he didn't yet know Carl well enough to trust him completely, or perhaps he didn't want to spread budget cut rumors just yet. Second, Enrique (who, you remember, had just received additional assignments) didn't have much time for chit-chat.

The brief interchange with Enrique and Carl illustrates that passive listening definitely has its time and place. For the sake of others and yourself, it is important to recognize times when you may not be up to anything more intense. It's perfectly OK to engage in a dialog in which you choose to respond with minimal focus.

Listening for Knowledge

Listening for knowledge usually occurs when a person is looking for objective, concrete information. People who are listening for knowledge are almost oblivious at times to nonverbal behaviors and feelings of others in the room. Intent on getting the facts and getting them straight, these people may not really be interested in interacting with others. They just want to obtain the content.

As a trainer, you can usually identify knowledge seekers by their content-oriented questions or by their offer of additional information to add to the program. Their objectives are clear: Clarify their knowledge and add it to their experience, or confirm or disprove what they already believe. There can be a great deal of interaction with this type of communication as individuals go back and forth analyzing and debating.

It is important as a trainer to know how to manage the level of content being shared. If fact finding is the primary purpose of the meeting, the listening should be verified by paraphrasing and writing down the facts. Diagrams and flowcharts help clarify the ideas shared, capture the information, and preserve the sequence of knowledge.

Listening for knowledge can engender active dialog. One primary way to verify that everyone is hearing and interpreting correctly is to use visual aids and ask questions to clarify. Have you ever attended a very productive meeting where many ideas

were discussed, new concepts were presented, and everyone went away feeling exhilarated, happy that now, at last, something was going to be accomplished? Did it ever happen that, perhaps a week later when the same people got together, the same discussions had to be rerun because one key person was missing from the first meeting and had to be brought up to speed? The contents, discussions, and decisions of the first meeting had not been captured in a way that the missing person could quickly and easily interpret. When listening for knowledge is involved, accurate recording is vital.

Active Listening

Active listening occurs when people take in and respond to a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. Someone listening actively is picking up the content, the emotion, and the inference of the speaker's message. That happens by hearing the words *and* watching the body language.

Obviously, it would be fantastic if all of your participants always listened actively and if you always presented clearly. Just as obviously, that scenario isn't very likely for many reasons. Active listening requires concentration on the speaker's intent. It also includes setting aside any outside barriers to communication, for example, personal concerns, looming projects, heat of the room, and so forth. An active listener must have the personal discipline necessary to read someone at the levels of content, emotion, and inference.

Don't give up because mastering the skill of active listening will change your interactions completely. This is where listening becomes an art—one that will serve you well. It's where you learn to read between the lines.

As a trainer who is listening actively, you have to take in the whole picture. As you observe the group, note the energy level. Is there a high-energy atmosphere in which people do not fear to speak out? Or, is the room subdued? Do participants feel a hesitancy to answer questions?

Let's consider the latter situation in which the participants are hesitant to answer questions or speak out. It's possible that you might not be able to do much to alleviate the situation because factors are at work (power variations among the participants or sensitivity of the topic) that you are unable to control. On the other hand, it makes sense to try to open up the group and get some energy flowing.

Although this may not be a comfortable thought, you might be doing something that is shutting down communication and closing off listening. Perhaps you've developed habits that are second nature (and thus unnoticed) but are annoying barriers for

your participants. Check the list of communication stoppers found in exercise 9-1. They illustrate just a few of the ways that trainers can unintentionally shut down open communication. Do any of them sound like you?

Exercise 9-1. Detecting communication stoppers.

Check off any of the following that might apply to you. How do you think each of these could stop communication?

- ☐ Telling jokes
- ☐ Telling too many stories about yourself
- ☐ Mentioning the time on a regular basis
- ☐ Cutting people off if they respond to questions or make comments
- ☐ Asking a question and then answering it yourself
- ☐ Laughing inappropriately at comments made
- ☐ Turning the conversation back to you instead of keeping it focused on the group
- ☐ Asking very direct, pointed questions and putting people on the spot
- ☐ Openly and directly contradicting a comment made by a participant without considering his or her point of view first.

Anytime that you distract or divert (telling jokes, laughing inappropriately, mentioning the time too frequently), put the focus on yourself, put people on the spot or cut them off, you stop the flow of communication. To keep the communication moving, treat your participants and their contributions with respect and compassion.

Noted

Videotape your sessions, and ask a good friend or colleague to critique them honestly.

Listening for Clarification

Once people open up and share their comments, it is important to clarify what the speaker intended to be communicated. As indicated before, extroverts have a habit of talking to process information, and introverts generally need to take some time to think and speak. An introvert under pressure may respond without taking adequate time to think through the response.

In the training arena, clarification is (at least) a two-way street. You need to check to be sure your intent is understood, you need to clarify a participant's comment before you respond, and you may have to engage in participant dialog to clarify so that they understand each other. Sometimes it may seem that it takes too much time to clarify, that what you are saying (or hearing) is obvious, and that you need to finish the objectives for the workshop. However, comments that are not clarified can lead to agreements and plans made on shaky ground. Those kind of things come back to bite you. Take the time to ensure that everyone understands one another.

One of the best ways to gain clarification is to open dialog with statements and questions. Certain phrases may set the speaker at ease:

- ▸ How could you tell me that in another way so I may understand better?
- ▸ Can you draw me a picture so I may see your idea better?
- ▸ Are you saying . . . ? (Paraphrase your understanding of their words.)
- ▸ Can someone else in the group paraphrase what you just heard Joyce say?
- ▸ What do you think Olney meant by that comment?
- ▸ How could we say that in another way?
- ▸ What would help clarify what was just said?
- ▸ Are there questions that I have left unanswered?
- ▸ It looks as if some of what I just said is confusing some of you. What can I clear up?
- ▸ John, I thought I just heard Gloria say . . . . Gloria, is that right?

Empathic Listening

Empathic listening is not for the weak or self-centered. Empathy is the identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings or thoughts of another person. This is the deepest level of listening, which occurs at the level of feelings and emotion. Because you are dealing with people's feelings, it is very important to assure the speaker of confidentiality and trust that the information shared will be used for a good purpose—to aid learning.

Empathic listening is possible only if you

- ▸ choose an appropriate time to discuss the issues
- ▸ clear your thoughts of your own personal issues
- ▸ maintain silence for as long as it takes for the speaker to truly identify and express his or her feelings and emotions.

What this means is that you honestly and without distraction try to place your-self as far as you can inside the other person's mind and heart even though you may not understand the feelings you experience there. It is not only what you under-stand, but also *how well the other person feels understood.* When you are listening empathically, make statements that identify the feelings and thoughts you are hear-ing from the other person. Validating these feelings and thoughts—especially if you don't agree—is the pivotal point in empathic listening.

Just as there are things to do with empathic listening, there are things to avoid. Doing any of the following sets up barriers and distractions:

▶ praising the speaker for giving you the answer you were seeking
▶ using humor to distract a person from the issue being described
▶ indicating you understand and saying that the same thing happened to you
▶ countering the speaker's point with a contrary opinion
▶ interrupting and cutting the speaker off before he or she has finished the thought
▶ making a demeaning comment about the speaker's past thoughts or behaviors
▶ analyzing the speaker's comments and putting your own interpretation on the comment
▶ invalidating the speaker's statement with logic or facts
▶ judging the speaker's thoughts or feelings
▶ intellectualizing about the comments
▶ asking who, where, what, how, and why questions.
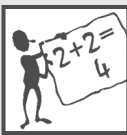
Basic Rule 22

Empathic listening is the most challenging communication style to master, yet it will expand your personal power and effectiveness.

So, with all these restrictions, what's left to ask? Not much. This process is not about asking questions and that is the tough part about empathic listening. If you ask a question, you automatically seize control of the direction of the conversation. It is easy to change the subject by simply asking a question or making a comment. To listen empathically takes observation, appropriate acknowledgment of the feel-ings voiced, and suppression of your own emotions and judgments.

To move to this level of listening takes time, practice, and sincerity. It is not a skill that comes naturally to most people. It requires a great deal of concentration. In fact, there may be many times when you are too involved with your own situation to focus exclusively on the other person and do the job properly.

Empathic listening is a powerful communication tool that you can use during your training sessions. It is especially helpful if you sense strong emotion from someone in the group. It can also be a way to defuse conflict in certain situations.

Although an inexperienced trainer may want to sweep any strong or unpleasant emotions under the rug for fear of losing control, that's not a good idea. For one thing, most people just want to know they have been heard and understood. They do not necessarily even want you to agree, but they do want you to understand why they feel the way they do, and accept and respect them as a people.

Dick, an experienced technical trainer, found that one of the learners in his class clearly did not want to be there. Anne felt she was too busy and had more important things to do with her time than sit through a computer training session. With her experience, she felt she would be able to figure out the new process on her own and didn't want to waste time in class.

Dick had a hunch there could be some underlying reasons for her reluctance. He started with a few statements to try to identify her resistance: "Anne, I understand your schedule is packed and that you believe you don't have time to be part of this training session."

After a moment's reflection, Anne said, "I've been putting in a lot of overtime lately completing this annual review. I just don't think I can afford to spend the time now in this training session."

Dick was sure that by giving her an opportunity to think about her choices and by listening he would make a great deal of headway. He followed up with another question, "Do you think your time would be better utilized for the next hour doing something else rather than helping us through this training session? We could use your help explaining some of the old forms to the newer people in the group."

Note that Dick had already decided that he would let Anne leave the session if he felt strongly that her participation would disrupt the class by venting her current emotions. Nevertheless, he was going to leave the decision about whether to attend up to her.

In this case, Dick's request for her help with the others in the class appealed to Anne. After she had a moment to think about it, she realized that her experience might help others and she could use the back-up at work down the road. In the end, she agreed to stay and participate.

In this example, Dick tried to identify Anne's feelings, which in this case may have been the pressure resulting from an overwhelming workload. Although it's possible that Anne may not have given the real reason for staying in the session, allowing her to explore her own feelings for a moment caused her to change her mind.

Listening Is a Critical Training Skill

Skilled listening is a critical part of the training process, one that often takes a back seat to presenting and facilitating. It really is an effective part of both, however. By developing some of the communication skills presented in this chapter and the next, you can greatly increase your ability to interact effectively with your participants.

Getting It Done

Do you apply the full range of listening styles in your personal and professional life? Take a few moments to think about when you use different styles of listening and how you might apply them more effectively (exercise 9-2).

Exercise 9-2. Identify your listening styles.

Take a few moments to reflect on the last three days. Try your hand at these exercises:

1. Jot down at least one time when you have used:

Passive listening: _____
_____
_____

Listening for knowledge: _____
_____
_____

Exercise 9-2. Identify your listening styles (continued).

Active listening: _____
_____
_____

Listening for clarification: _____
_____
_____

Empathic listening: _____
_____
_____

2. Given the situations listed above, did you choose the most appropriate level of listening each time?

3. Based on the content and concepts of this chapter, could you have done anything differently? If so, what?
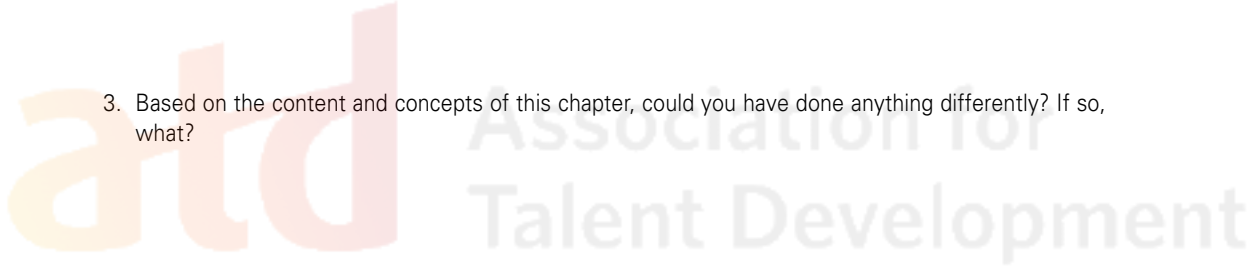
As you've seen in this chapter, listening is an art, but, so is eliciting an appropriate response. Chapter 10 shows you how to listen in ways that encourage people to talk.

10

But When I Listen, Nobody Talks!

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What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll have a chance to read about:

▶ Concrete statements that draw people out
▶ The value and use of clarifying questions
▶ The importance of reflective moment
▶ Ways of evaluating your own listening techniques.

By now you realize that there are many levels of listening, hearing, and under-standing. The good news is that the nuances presented at each level offer many opportunities to connect with the participants in a group setting. Of course, the bad news is that listening is probably more complicated than you may have thought before.

The second bit of good news is that these well-honed listening skills make it possible for you to quickly key into your participants and respond accordingly. This is an extremely important skill for any trainer to possess. You can set the tone for the entire day in the first 15 minutes of a session, and you do so by the way you respond when participants answer your questions.

Listening Is Hard Work

You learned in chapter 9 that although listening is often thought of as a relaxed, passive activity, the truth is quite the opposite. True listening takes a great deal of energy, focus, and concentration. This hurried, modern world seems to allow little time to stop and really listen. Even more important, there seems to be no time to verify what we have heard or check if our understanding is correct from the speaker's point of view. In other words, much of the time we can't verify that what we heard was what was being said.

Things become even more complex when, as trainers, we face a group of people who all have their own issues, experiences, and private agendas. The temptation is great to skim the surface of interaction and focus on covering the content and accomplishing the objectives.

Milton was a very concerned trainer who cared passionately about a topic he presented often. Milton was very comfortable with the material, and over time he had perfected his delivery. He appeared to be extremely comfortable in front of the group.

So far so good, right? Wrong. His presentation was so smooth that it was losing its effectiveness. Milton had become too good, too practiced. The more he presented the same material, the more he lost touch with the audience. He was so intent on making a flawless presentation that he often became disconnected from the groups he was working with. His focus was on the presentation, on the topic, and away from the participants. He had become a trainer who liked to hear himself talk.

Trainers meet plenty of Milton clones in their workshops; they're people who seem to be in love with their own voice. At some point, the trainer must make a judgment call: Is this a person who merely likes to talk or is this someone with something to contribute? This level of discernment requires that the trainer be able to listen "between the lines." If you make these judgments accurately and quickly, you can keep the group moving forward. If you do not, the group can bog down, and little is accomplished.

Listening Is an Art

Listening is an art that every trainer should develop. For experienced and effective trainers, it becomes an almost kinesthetic sense that tells them when to pursue clarifying the feelings of an individual participant and when to back off. The key to making this decision is often a hunch that clarifying or understanding those feelings might benefit the group. Because the feelings of one person often mirror those of

others, knowing those feelings and thoughts can give you great insight into the temperature of the group at the time. Such clarification may also bring out differences of opinion, experience, or content knowledge within the group. Again, depending on your objectives for the session, awareness of differences and similarities among group members can provide an additional direction for your presentation.

Interacting and Internalizing: The Keys to Listening

Milton was like many people. He began gradually to lose his passion about the topic as he continued to present. He became smooth and somewhat plastic. He lost the fun and immediacy of the presentation, and that loss seemed to correlate with his lack of ability to listen to the participants. Gradually, Milton began to learn that it was not only what he said that made an impact, but also how he presented the material and how he interacted with the individuals in the group.

One key to true listening is to internalize the other person's comments. This process is very different from just hearing words and assimilating the transmitted information. When you internalize, you actually try to see the world through the eyes of another. This task is much more difficult than you might think.

Often we hear people say, "I understand how you feel." Although their intentions are good, the reality is much different. It is impossible to actually understand someone else's situation and how that person may feel, even though you may have found yourself in similar circumstances. You can only *try* to empathize, clarify, or identify feelings. Interestingly, though, it is the effort that matters. It is the idea that you are *trying* to understand, not just saying "I understand," that makes the difference to the other person.

Some Sample Responses

An important skill of an effective trainer is the practiced ability to listen between the lines—to pay attention, infer, and draw out hesitant participants. Focus on nonverbal signals or a comment that the participant may have made. Table 10-1 lists some examples of statements you can use when you want to engage a participant or respond to specific behavior.

Some of the statements shown on table 10-1 could even sound like questions depending on the inflection of your voice. What you are doing is opening the door for people to state how they feel or think at the moment and inviting them to participate more fully in the experience.
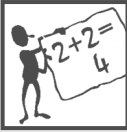
Table 10-1. Statements that reflect effective listening.

Purpose	Sample Statements
To respond to distraction:	• Sam, you seem to be distracted today. • Phyllis, you look perplexed and seem to have questions. • Jane, you seem preoccupied. • Darryl, I feel as if you are thinking about something else or perhaps thinking about what we're discussing in a little different way. • Filippo, it sounds as if you are considering other options to this concept.
To respond to disagreement:	• Wayne, you seem to want to say something. Do you disagree with what George just said? • Dianne, you don't seem to agree with the conclusions that were reached before the break. • George, you look as if you have a comment that differs from Phillipe. • Juan, it sounds like you might have a different take on that situation.
To respond to agreement:	• Liz, you sound as if you agree with the comments George and Bette made. • Mohammed, you look as if you may have a similar example to share. • Bob, you look like there might be a relevant point you would like to make.
To respond to confusion:	• This might be an opportunity for you to share your understanding, Sean. • Your interpretation of what was just presented might help me clarify my thoughts, Reba. • Restating what you just heard in another way may help us clarify your interpretation of the material, Brent. • Help me understand your viewpoint, Raoul.

The Importance of Reflection

Another critical step in the listening process is to allow a moment of silence for people to reflect, process, and think. This moment is viewed differently by extroverts than it is by introverts.

Extroverts generally have difficulty allowing a brief moment of time to go by. They feel a need to fill the space with talk. Unfortunately, this is the time that introverts need to slow down and replay the messages in their heads before they respond. Trainers are often extroverts, and extroverts are quick to move on if someone doesn't respond immediately. Avoid the impulse to speak too quickly.

Basic Rule 23

Good trainers allow the group's ideas and thoughts to simmer like a good stew to bring out the best flavors.

Opening Up in a Political Environment

Another interesting organizational phenomenon occurs because people have learned to be coy in public to avoid their words being taken out of context. Of course, a trainer hopes to create a safe and secure environment for learning, but pressures in the organizational culture may convince participants to keep their thoughts close to the vest.

Basic Rule 24

Creating an open environment for people to feel safe to talk is a difficult process that takes patience and persistence.

Questions Can Be the Key

Let's go back to Milton, the talkative trainer. He heard rumors of downsizing and sensed that people were reluctant to speak up in this uncertain organizational climate. This hesitancy created a situation in which Milton was doing the majority of the talking throughout the session. Not only did this become exhausting (even for him), but he was beginning to wonder what the participants were thinking or if they were even listening to what he was saying.

On several occasions, Milton asked, "Are there any questions?" and the question fell on a silent room. However, during break times people chattered away. He considered the range of explanations for the learners' hesitancy:

- ▶ He was doing such a great job explaining the training material that the participants were immediately grasping all the concepts.
- ▶ The participants didn't agree with him but were too polite or intimated to say so.
- ▶ The learners did not understand the ideas he was presenting at all.
- ▶ The participants were preoccupied by something else and weren't really focused on what he was presenting.

Milton changed his approach and began to call on individuals by name, asking neutral questions. He was careful to ask his questions in such a way that it did not appear that he was seeking a certain answer. Once he started to focus on nonverbal participant behaviors, he began asking specific questions, such as:

- ▶ "Linda, what do you think about the point Bill just made?
- ▶ "Zack, do you have any thoughts to add to what we just discussed?"
- ▶ "Orion, do you have a differing opinion?"

Milton was beginning to learn at least one dependable way to begin to listen to each person in the room. Start by treating each person as an individual with unique thoughts, ideas, and feelings. By setting a pattern of expectation that they might be asked to respond, you encourage participants to pay more attention. If your questions require thought, participants will generally try to respond with a relevant answer.

As Milton became more practiced at asking questions, he found that some people were great at repeating or paraphrasing what had just been said in the discussion. It soon became obvious that these people were in the room to get on with the topic, get to the bottom line, complete the course, and perhaps leave early.

The hidden agendas became clearer as the course progressed. This was something for Milton to cope with because he was still passionate for the participants to at least consider the topic and give it some thought. He hoped that they would actually use the information on the job and that it would help make their jobs easier.
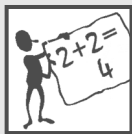
Basic Rule 25
Your responses to answers of your questions can determine the future participation of the group.

What Milton quickly learned was that his responses to the participants' answers were carefully observed by everyone in the session. He saw that if he countered their answers with his opinion or content material, group members would shut down.

It was difficult for Milton, a natural-born talker, to not respond with the first thought that popped into his head. Such comments could easily inhibit people who were shy or unsure about their response. People in general are usually willing to go along with the group, either to speed up the session or to appear to fit in.

Milton resolved to slow down, take a deep breath, and put the brakes on his comments and behavior. He listened carefully to their responses instead of watching the clock to be sure he was marching through the material in good time.

Milton used neutral statements that sounded like questions to encourage people to elaborate on their thoughts and to clarify their responses.

Take a moment now to evaluate your own listening techniques by working on exercise 10-1.

Exercise 10-1. Gauging your own responses.

1. Do you naturally have an answer on the tip of your tongue when someone responds to your questions? ____ Yes ____ No.
   How do you generally comment? _____
   _____
   _____

2. Do you tend to hold your ground and defend your position or the material? ____ Yes ____ No
   What types of comments do you generally make? _____
   _____
   _____

3. Do you pause briefly and process the answer given by the participant? ____ Yes ____ No
   How do you respond to the person who just made the comment? _____
   _____
   _____

4. If you have a tendency to bring up an alternative thought, do you stop and assess what the impact will be on the group? ____ Yes ____ No
   What are your options other than your first response? _____
   _____
   _____

5. Do you make a conscious effort to affirm what was just contributed to the group?
   ____ Yes ____ No
   What statements can you make to show your understanding of the comments recently made?
   _____
   _____

Exercise 10-1. Gauging your own responses (continued).

6. Do you make periodic attempts to summarize the feedback or the content?   _____ Yes   _____ No

   How would you normally summarize the comments? _____

   _____

   _____

7. Do you make occasional attempts to summarize the content of the training topic?

   _____ Yes   _____ No

   How often do you summarize the content and what methods do you use? _____

   _____

   _____

8. Do you seek hidden questions and try to work in responses?   _____ Yes   _____ No

   What are hidden questions, and how do you normally respond? _____

   _____

   _____

Why ask these questions? Your answers may help meet each participant's expectations even if they vary a great deal from person to person. Let's take a closer look at the range of responses so that you can gain additional insight into yourself and your approach:

- *Immediate responses:* By answering with the first thought that comes to your mind, you may hit the target for one person, but you may miss the mark for the rest of the group. A minute of extra thought can give you an opportunity to regroup and remember the goals of the course.
- *Reiterating your position:* Automatically responding with written, scripted responses may be appropriate and safe. People can detect if you are sincere in your answer or if it is text you are merely reciting. Try to put a little bit of yourself into your responses while considering the participants' experiences and feelings.
- *The brief pause:* A momentary hiatus can give everyone in the room a chance to reflect and think about how they would respond. You may even be able to ask someone else to comment on the information just presented to the group. It is important to remember you are not the only expert in the room.

An answer from the group may be more insightful and meaningful at that particular time.

▶ *Alternative thoughts:* Paraphrasing what the participant just said before launching into your response is an extremely valuable way to make sure you captured the essence of the question. This action not only gives you time to think about the question clearly, it is a big help for all the participants to have a chance to hear the question and your interpretation. In fact, it's absolutely critical for you to repeat or rephrase a question or comment in a large room where some of the participants may not be able to hear words spoken in different areas of the room.

▶ *Affirmation:* This is a delicate way to assure a member of the group that his or her comments have been heard and understood. Although it's somewhat of a paradox, affirming a participant's comments in a succinct way can actually reduce repetition because if you are able to capture and play back what the speaker said, it will reduce the tendency for the person to repeat the comments.

▶ *Summary of feedback:* By periodically summarizing what you have heard from the group, you can accomplish several things: You acknowledge the contributions made by the group and show you were listening as the course has progressed. You demonstrate there are alternative ways to view the information presented. You can open up diversity in opinions, depending on the topic you are presenting.

▶ *Summary of content:* By halting the process periodically and going back to review what has occurred, you serve several purposes: First, you help people who were momentarily distracted to catch up on some valuable points they may have missed. Second, you give learners an opportunity to put all of the information in context for their own situations. We can only absorb so much information in a short period of time so these summaries—really a form of active listening—can be invaluable. So often when trainers are short of time, they skip the summary at the end. People are generally tired and may have been overwhelmed with information. Intermittent summaries throughout the session reinforce the learning in bite-sized portions and actually encourage learning.

▶ *Hidden questions:* First of all, what are hidden questions? They are the questions that, although unspoken, you can sense by observing body language, discern from questions stemming from external information provided prior

to the session, and pick up on through comments made at the breaks. These are the questions people are afraid to ask in public for fear of retribution or of opening a can of worms. As the facilitator, you can often pose the question yourself to the group. If it is a political hot potato, you can open the door and let them know the topic is something that can at least be identified as an issue, even if they do not feel safe to discuss the topic.

Getting It Done

This chapter provided you an opportunity to see how the effectiveness of your training hinges on a critical skill: listening. You've learned about some techniques that can help you draw people out, listen to them interactively, and invite their participation in the learning experience.

Exercise 10-2 can help you identify some characteristics in your personality that may affect how you well you listen.

Exercise 10-2. Reflecting on your own personality.

1. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

2. How does your personality affect the way you respond as a participant in a training situation?

3. List two things you've learned in this chapter that you will use as a participant to get the most from your next training experience.

You've just had a chance to think about the art of listening, now let's take it one step further. A true listening artist can "listen between the lines," paying attention to all the nonverbal communication as well. Chapter 11 shows you how.

Nonverbal Cues

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll learn about:

▶ What you are saying when you stop talking
▶ Paying attention to body language—yours and others.

So far this book has reviewed various types of verbal communication and presented you with many options. Now it's time to review the single most powerful form of communication—nonverbal.
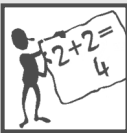
Basic Rule 26
Nonverbal behaviors are the most powerful and most readily received form of communication.

More than 80 percent of communication is delivered and received without words, hence the expressions "Actions speak louder than words," "It's not enough to talk the talk, you've got to walk the walk," and "You are judged by your behavior not by your intentions."

Even if we don't realize it, we are constantly being observed and judged. And, the people who are forming opinions about us are doing so subconsciously. Drawing conclusions from nonverbal behavior is something we learn to do as babies, when we interact with the people in our lives.

The Downside of Nonverbal Cues

Although nonverbal behavior is extremely useful, it's also fraught with danger. That is, just as we can draw quick conclusions about another person, we may just as quickly misjudge him or her—based solely on observable traits.

This subconscious processing of nonverbal cues can reassure us when the coast is clear or cause us to feel wary if danger is about. These instincts have served us well, perpetuated our species for thousands of years, and ensured long-term survival.
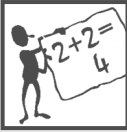
Basic Rule 27

Know when to trust your instincts for self-preservation and when to override irrational judgments.

Our natural fear of the unknown is a built-in defense system that protects us from harm. Nevertheless, it is not always a good idea to assume that our fears are based on anything solid. Therefore, we need to double-check. So often we are quick to believe what others have told us and slow to challenge all the alternatives.

For some reason, we seem to think that our minds and emotions are identical to the minds and emotions of others. How many times have you heard someone say, "Well, I'd never be caught doing that!" The socialization and cultural norms of the various segments of society vary, but that does not necessarily make one better than the other. As a trainer, it is good for you to be open to different ways of observing customs and showing respect. Also as a trainer, you want to model respectful and accepting behavior. To do so, you need to be aware of any prejudices you may have developed subconsciously over the years, challenge those concepts, and determine whether or not the information you have absorbed is really valid.

There may be some things you learned as you were growing up that caused you to fear or dislike people who are different from you. The messages we receive in our youth can be very strong, and we may neither be aware of nor question the validity

> ## Basic Rule 28
> If you believe you do not have prejudices, you may want to reevaluate your premise.

of the subtle emotions triggered by nonverbal encounters with others. We all have preferences, and those preferences influence all of the nonverbal messages we receive as well as those we send.

Challenge Your Boundaries

Even though we may feel open to others, we all have a line that marks the edge of our comfort zone. Ideally, you will use the opportunities presented by a training career to stretch that comfort zone and to challenge some of your boundaries so that you can expand your understanding of other cultures.

For example, some of the most insightful training sessions you may experience during your career may include diversity workshops. By talking to other people and confirming or discrediting your belief of why they behave in certain ways, you will grow and so will they. You may walk away with completely different impressions than the ones you had formed through observation of nonverbal behaviors.

Most of us hear the negative comments people make about others—about people they never met, conversed with, or had any contact with. As a trainer, it is your responsibility to model desirable workplace interaction. You can help create a much more productive work environment if you give people a chance: Listen first, ask questions second, and try to find common ground.

Receiving Nonverbal Messages

Observing nonverbal behavior and incorporating your observation into the interaction is the key to active listening. Without first observing the look in people's eyes, their stance, and their energy level, you cannot hope to guess how they are feeling. In addition, you cannot assume that the way you might choose to respond to a situation would evoke a similar response from others around the world.

It's tough to go into a roomful of learners and not make some snap judgments about who might be friendly and receptive, who might create conflict, who might have brilliant ideas, who might be uninterested. But, don't be too hasty: The best ideas and comments often come from the most unlikely sources.

Sending Nonverbal Messages

People are observing you closely as you enter the room for a training session. Your preparedness, your approach—formal or casual—the way you dress, and the room setup all help them form an opinion about you.

Your demeanor should send a strong message of confidence. Are you smiling and relaxed, or do you appear stressed and uptight? Your attitude is something the group will pick up on as soon as you enter the room.

The truth is that the trainer does not always control or choose the setting or the room setup. Nevertheless, the participants will assume that you did. The room setup becomes, in effect, a nonverbal message because they assume the setup has resulted from decisions you made. The good news is that you can change the setup if you need to, even in the middle of a workshop.

Recently, Peter, an experienced trainer, entered a large ballroom set with straight rows of chairs and skirted tables facing the front of the room, with large screens on either side for computer presentations. Fortunately, some seats were unoccupied. To infuse some energy and foster some dialog, Peter asked people in every other row to turn and face the row behind them for a 10-minute discussion.

People who didn't expect to be talking to one another had an interactive moment. They met one or two new people and were able to express some of their opinions. Although the group was too large for individual comments to be shared, Peter's improvisation created a new environment and a new energy. It also changed the boring image some people may have had when they walked in and engaged them more completely in the workshop session.

Stretch Your Comfort Zone

Remember the self-assessment you completed in chapter 4 in which you identified your comfort level? You may want to challenge yourself and try something totally out of your comfort zone the next time you present. This assumes, of course, that your choice is appropriate for the session.

Stretching your comfort zone by changing the way you typically present allows you to change and adapt. Although you aren't going to change who you are, you can change your behaviors and, in doing so, develop more presentation options that make it easier for you to reach more diverse groups. The more flexible you are as a presenter, trainer, facilitator, or coach, the better it is for the learners. And your adaptability can serve as a model to help each learner determine his or her own preferences and identify ways flexibility could increase.

Body Language

Body language is one type of nonverbal behavior. Much has been made of it in the last 20 years or so. One of the more popular misconceptions is that we can actually tell how people are feeling based on their body language. One assumption is that a person whose arms are crossed in front of the chest is unreceptive to what is being said. If, however, you were to apply some of the active listening techniques mentioned in previous chapters, you might learn instead that the person is simply cold or that his or her stance is just a comfortable position.

Unfortunately, the misreading of nonverbal behaviors may lead to misconceptions. You may change your presentation style based on the nonverbal messages of your audience, and it still may not be accurate. This is the time, as a trainer, where you should not be to quick to judge how your audience is reading your observable behaviors.

Exercise 11-1 may give you some thoughts about how you make judgments based on nonverbal behaviors.

Exercise 11-1. Making judgments based on nonverbal behaviors.

1. When you see a person nodding off during your presentation, you assume:
   A. The person is totally bored with what you are saying.
   B. The person didn't get enough sleep last night.
   C. The person's blood sugar has dropped because it is just before lunch.

2. One of your participants begins talking to the person next to him or her and doesn't appear to be listening. You assume:
   A. The person is bored and making snide comments about your presentation.
   B. The person is colorblind and cannot read the PowerPoint presentation. The person's neighbor has been reading the slides aloud to help the participant follow the presentation.
   C. The person's hearing is impaired. The other participant is repeating the presentation to help out.

3. When there is a break, the participants are polite but do not seek you out to make conversation or ask questions. You think:
   A. They are not interested in the topic, and it was a mandatory session for them to attend. They have a huge backload of work, and it is near the year's end.
   B. They are not receptive to the material, and the subjects are not what they expected to be covered in the session.
   C. There are rumors of political changes about a purchase of the company, and the participants are worried about their job security.

Exercise 11-1. Making judgments based on nonverbal behaviors (continued).

4. There are three people speaking loudly in the back of the meeting room near the continental breakfast table, and you feel:

   A. Irritated because they are rude to stand in the back of the room while you are trying to conduct a training session.

   B. As if you want to ask them to join the group or move their discussion to the hallway outside the meeting room.

   C. Distracted by their conversation and unable to concentrate on your presentation because they are VIPs from the company. You wonder what they are discussing.

5. You are in the question-and-answer portion of the training session, but no one is asking any questions. You are concerned:

   A. The topics are too complex, and the participants do not understand enough of the material to ask questions.

   B. The material is something most of the participants already know, and they are bored with the presentation.

   C. They are preoccupied with work back at the office and hope that by not asking questions the session will be shortened.

6. You walk into a meeting room with a smile, and many of the learners are already assembled. Not many people are smiling back, though. Apparently your session has followed another meeting that just concluded in the same room. No one seems very happy, and you wonder:

   A. Has the information from the previous meeting included some bad news?

   B. Have they just been given a great deal of work to do and are now worried about meeting deadlines?

   C. Are they are unhappy about your presentation topic?

7. You're getting ready to present the concept of a training program to a group of upper-level managers. The group seems friendly, and there is much joking and laughter among the members of the management team. They are leaning back in their chairs and seem very relaxed. You are wondering:

   A. If they are going to take your presentation seriously.

   B. How important this group views training in general.

   C. If you have lucked out and picked a good day when everyone in the room is apparently in a good mood.

8. You are meeting some learners for the first time as they enter the room. Everyone seems very quiet, and you're not sure about the appropriate degree of formality you should use to introduce yourself to the group. Your best alternative is to:

   A. Shake hands with everyone and introduce yourself personally as they enter.

   B. Wait until people are seated and then wander around to the tables and introduce yourself informally to everyone seated at the tables.

   C. Ask some questions of people who seem to not be talking to anyone else to learn a little bit more about them personally.

9. You have participants in your sessions who are from different cultures from all over the world and the United States. You are deciding how close to get to individuals when you are talking to them at the orientation gathering the first evening of the workshop. You are debating about how close you should stand from the other people:

    A. One to two feet from the person you are talking to at the moment.

    B. Three to four feet from each person in a small group.

    C. More than four feet from the person you are speaking to in the group.

10. As the trainer you are being asked to observe people working on a new software program at their workstations. Because of the setup, you need to look over their shoulders to observe. To help them feel more comfortable, you plan to:

    A. Sit in a small chair on wheels so you are behind and at the same level or lower than the person at the computer.

    B. Stand behind the person about two feet away from the person and the computer.

    C. Sit next to the person at the workstation so you can both see the screen easily.

As you've probably noted, there are no correct answers to the scenarios posed in exercise 11-1. The safe way to approach these situations is to confirm through active listening statements and clarifying questions which of the interpretations may be accurate. You may be surprised to find a fourth or fifth alternative that never would have occurred to you, but the only way you will know is if you confirm your suspicion with the person you are observing.

Over time you may become more confident about guessing what another person is feeling or thinking. But, before you act on surface information, which may be clouded by your experience and interpretations, take a step back to reflect on possible alternatives.
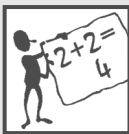
> ## Basic Rule 29
> To get a good feel for corporate culture, pay attention to the environment, employee dress, and body language.

Organizational Culture

There are many workplace situations where you must be able to read between the lines. The building can give you a clue. What's the design—a sleek, modern building (dynamic environment) or a historic building (stable environment)? Close quarters with little workspace and privacy can indicate a very budget-driven organization

with little in the way of excess funds. Dress codes may range from very formal (suits) to casual, including jeans. Even though workplace attire has relaxed quite a bit in the last few decades, each organization has a slightly different idea of what is acceptable. When you are entering an organization for the first time, it is always safer to go with fairly conservative, formal attire than to be too casual.

Improving Your Nonverbal Messages

As Susan Quilliam (1995) notes, it's possible that you may want to modify the impression that your co-workers have of you. Perhaps you lack confidence and show it with shaky gestures, a trembling voice, stuttering speech, a dry mouth, pale color, or clumsiness.

You can use visualization to increase your confidence and change those nonverbal messages. First, imagine a time when you were on top of your game, feeling confident, and eliciting positive responses from the audience. Start slowing down your breathing with long, deep breaths. Stand firmly with your weight evenly balanced on both feet and knees slightly flexed, and practice making comments until your voice doesn't crack or tremble. Relax your muscles by doing a few warm-up stretches with your arms and legs. It may sound like you're going to run track, but your physical and mental warm-up can get you started on the right foot. Then, once you're on a roll, you can relax as the presentation progresses.

To reduce the stress that causes your stomach to churn, your palms to sweat, and your heart to pound, you'll need to practice some counteractive mental imagery. If possible, remove yourself from the situation and take a brisk walk. This is where a trip to the photocopying machine or the water cooler on the other side of the building can help. While you are changing your environment, think of some other places you would like to be at this moment. Take the mental remote control and switch channels to a very pleasant place where you would be calmer and more relaxed. Even looking out the window on a nice day can help lift your spirits if the weather is pleasant.

Eat something healthy that will give you an energy boost or calm you down, depending on what is needed at the moment. Skip the caffeine and sugar usually available at meetings and go for the water instead.

These examples illustrate the most powerful way to gain control of your behavior: Changing how you feel can be the beginning of improving the way you present yourself to others.

Getting It Done

Your internal communications work together with your observable and verbal communications to create an overall impression of you as a communicator. Think more about your nonverbal communication as you work through the questions in exercise 11-2.

Exercise 11-2. Building your own style.

1. What impression do you want to purposely create to others?

2. How will you change your nonverbal behaviors in the future?

3. List the combination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors you plan to work on changing in the future to create a more positive impression with your role as a trainer.

4. How would you want others to describe you as a trainer?

It should come as no surprise to you that this book is about communication—in all its permutations. As a trainer, one of the most important things you can communicate to your participants is the possibility of success. At the end of your class or workshop session, you want them to leave wanting more. Chapter 12 shows you how to end on a high note.

To Infinity and Beyond

What's Inside This Chapter

Here, you'll learn how to:

▶ Communicate a feeling of success to your participants
▶ Increase the likelihood that they will want to learn more about the topic
▶ Ensure participants are positively disposed to attend another one of your workshops.

The End Is Only the Beginning

By the time you've reached the end of the workshop, you're probably ready to pack it in, wrap up the equipment, take down the flipcharts, collect the evaluations, and go home. But, hold on! The end of the workshop is only the beginning. If you've done your job, your learners will be excited about your topic, have a clear understanding of its value to them, and be ready to put their learning to use on the job tomorrow.

Now that you've finished, you don't just want them to leave. You want them to *want* to come back! You want them to spread the word so that others will come too.

Positive press is the most important way that a training department builds its ability to make an impact on the organization because more people listen to word of mouth than to all of the announcements and inducements combined.

So what's the trick? How do you end the workshop in such a way that people go out smiling, energized, and ready to come back someday? Truthfully, there are a few tricks to this part of your job, but first check out the following vignette. See if you can figure out what Debra did wrong.

Debra was near the end of a full day of training. The subject was somewhat technical—a new accounting and tracking process designed to improve the company's ability to track costs and plan for the future. The day had been so full that she had to cut short the breaks and the lunch hour. She and the learners had been hard at this effort for most of the day.

As Debra prepared to cut off small-group discussion, process, and then launch into the final activity of the day, she happened to glance at the clock. With horror she realized that the group was scheduled to leave in just 20 minutes. Suddenly the list of activities, which had looked manageable only a few hours ago, now seemed impossible to complete.

"I'm sorry to stop you so quickly, but I just noticed that we have only a few minutes left until you go home. We still have some things to cover, so if you'll just return to your seats and take out your notebooks, I'll give you the details quickly. Please hurry and get reorganized quickly. We can squeeze this in if we hurry." Debra's tone was abrupt and no-nonsense.

Once the participants were back in their seats, she pulled up a PowerPoint slide that contained a lengthy list of important items to remember about the new system. Debra ran through the list and was able to finish on time but didn't have time for questions.

Considering everything, Debra felt like she had pulled it off. She got in all of the information, she finished in time, and everyone turned in an evaluation. Imagine her surprise when she read the comments: "I don't see how I'm ever going to figure out this new system." "This workshop was no help at all. I feel overwhelmed." "The trainer rushed us and didn't listen to us." "I felt like a captive—no breaks and hardly any lunch."

"That's not true," Debra fumed. "They had one break in the morning and another in the afternoon. These people are spoiled! They think that they come to training to relax. It must be that the schools are not teaching like they used to. The people we get expect that learning is fun and easy. Wimps!"

You Have to Tell Them, and Tell Them, and Tell Them Again

The old marketing instructions are still true. You have to:

▶ Tell them what you're going to tell them.

▶ Tell them.

▶ Tell them what you told them.

Seem too obvious? Not to Debra it wasn't—and probably it won't seem obvious to you either when you're in the midst of a workshop overloaded with must-know information. Somehow you have to communicate to your learners that this information is vital and that it can—and must—be mastered. This is not easy when you start with a group of people who have a wide variety of readiness levels for and attitudes about the new system or process.

The proof of training is in the application. If your learners can't or won't put your information to use, then you have wasted everyone's time. The following sections describe how you can give your participants enthusiasm for the subject and send them out knowing what to do first.

Plan Ahead

Your control of the day begins when you plan the presentation. As you study the material, it will be obvious to you which points are absolute imperatives and which are helpful information. Prepare a handout or a job aid that summarizes the most important points. The learners need something to take away with them to recap the day, and they need some equipment to immediately apply on the job what they have learned in your session. By taking the time to do this, you are communicating several things at once:

▶ This material is important, and it needs to be put to use.

▶ You care enough about the learners that you outlined what is most important for them and their work situations.

▶ Although you covered a great deal of information in the training session, this is the key information and it's manageable.

Assume the Importance

At the start of the workshop, take a few moments to explain what the new system will do, how it will make their jobs either easier or more effective, and why it's so important that they know how to use this system effectively. It's necessary for you to

do this because people are inundated with information every day. Unfortunately, some workshops (not yours, of course!) mean nothing more to a participant than a time to prepare a to-do list for the coming weeks. Learners are used to pasting on a polite face and turning off their minds until the break or lunch. You have to counter that attitude and, at the same time, give them a heads-up message. You need to send a clear message that they will be expected to apply this information and that people will be evaluated on their ability to do so.

Give Them an Attitude of Success

Next, you have to let the learners know that they *can* master this information. The system they are expected to learn is not rocket science, nor must the participants be information technology specialists. This is where your work ahead of time can pay off. You will have developed effective checklists, job aids, summaries, or some combination thereof to provide to the learners at the conclusion of the session. These tools recap the information you presented and offer the learners something to refer to later. This reference information needs to be easy to read and quick to use because the learners will be trying to read it and apply it at the same time. You can do them a giant favor if you have condensed the information and made it immediately usable.

Make It Logical

Take extra care to be sure that your workshop flow makes sense. With a complicated subject, some trainers depend on the wisdom of system designers. The problem is that the order of learning suggested by the designers may not be appropriate for new learners. You'll have to use your own judgment, but if the information you are presenting is technical or challenging, then take extra time to learn it yourself so that you can distill it to a more manageable form. By doing so, you increase the engagement of your participants and send them out with something they *know* they can use. This situation is much preferable to sending them out with something they are *afraid* they'll *have* to use.

Summarize the Salient Points Again

The key to sending out people who are energized, rather than people who are overwhelmed and anxious, is to give them the salient points once more before they

leave. This is vital in a technical workshop but desirable in every training situation. In essence, you are telling them why they were here and why they are glad they came. You are helping them feel good about the time they have invested in your workshop.

Give Them References for Future Learning

Assume that your participants want to know more, that you have made this subject so compelling that they won't be able to resist learning more about it. Or, that it is so applicable that they will put it to work right away and want to go further.

You have a chance to give them opportunities for further learning in the form of references. These could be books, courses or workshops, videos, or Websites. The list of helpful information is probably quite long. Remember, though, that no matter how thoroughly you discuss these enticing next steps, it's vital that you provide references in writing. By the time the workshop is nearing its end, the participants may be starting to make a mental transition and miss some of what you are saying. It's important that they have control of future learning and that you give them that control by listing future references or growth opportunities at the end of the workshop materials or in an appendix.

Thank Them

When you are closing the workshop, thank the participants for their attention and involvement in the workshop. This step is imperative because it lets everyone know that you appreciated his or her efforts. Everyone likes (and needs) to feel appreciated. Saying thank you adds a little bit of polish and courtesy to any training event. It's just a courteous thing to do. If you want people to come back, the least you can do is be nice.

End Early

Give your participants a little boost by ending the workshop early. If you have organized the information and managed your time, then it will be possible to finish up a bit early while allowing plenty of time to complete the evaluations.

Ending early sends the message that you respect the participants' time, and you know that they have a life outside the company. Recognizing participants as people first and learners second goes a long way toward building a relationship with them. Ending early is a subtle way to provide this recognition.

About Those Evaluations

You know you're at the end when you hand out the evaluations. Even at this moment, how you present your evaluation and how you ask the questions can influence the attitudes your learners have when they leave.

First, present the evaluations in a positive way. Don't just lay them on the table and tell the participants to pick one up and complete it before they leave. Instead, hand out the evaluations personally and, as you do so, thank the learners for taking the time to fill it out thoughtfully. Be sure to mention that you use the results of these evaluations to plan future training sessions. Emphasize that their comments will be used to augment the training materials, the approach, and the basic content. In other words, even this routine workshop requirement has value and their involvement is important.

Second, structure the evaluation so that it plants positive rather than negative impressions in the minds of the participants. Your questions can be upbeat and forward thinking, or they can be critical and focused on complaints. For example, look at the following two ways to find out what the participant intended to use most immediately and to identify things in the workshop that may have detracted from the focus:

- ▶ "What was most valuable to you about this workshop? What was least valuable?"
- ▶ "What was most valuable to you about this workshop? What would you add or modify?"

Either way, you would find out the same things—what the participants liked and what they didn't. But, the first version places a subtle complaint in their minds (what was least valuable). The second ends on a positive note, asking for forward-thinking comments (what should be added or modified). The difference is subtle, but the difference between positive and negative often is.

Also include on the evaluation a question that asks for ideas about future training. Again, this will allow the participants a chance to be part of the evolution of the training program and permit you to begin to identify participant needs and trends.

Tell Them What's Next

Finally, before participants leave, be sure that you give them a list of upcoming training programs even if those programs are not directly related to the current topic. Doing so communicates to the learners that your department is hard at work

developing experiences that have meaning to them and to the organization. Energize them by letting them know that they are part of something that is dynamic rather than a stagnant program that presents reruns of the same old workshop.

Your Attitude Is Your Gratitude

One more thing that will send them out smiling emanates directly from you—your attitude. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude; be grateful when people are thankful, when they are involved, when they are merely present in the room. *Every person sitting in front of you represents an opportunity for you to make a difference.*

But, be on guard: Be grateful for the small things you can do because your impact will be found in the small changes experienced over time by individuals whose work lives are affected by the efforts of your department. It's not an overnight thing. You'll grow frustrated if you expect quick gratification. Keep a tight handle on your own attitude and be confident that your efforts make a difference, every day.

Getting It Done

In this chapter, you've read about some ways that you can end your workshop, leaving your learners excited about the topic and with an appreciation of its value to them. Exercise 12-1 can help you start thinking about ways to conclude your training and help the participants get ready to put their learning to use on the job tomorrow.

Exercise 12-1. Planning for an effective wrap-up.

Take a few minutes to review one of the workshop agendas that you have developed and plan to use in the future. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What are the most important points in this workshop?

2. If I had to cut anything, what would I cut?

Exercise 12-1. Planning for an effective wrap-up (continued).

3. What can the participants put to work immediately?

4. How can I prepare the participants to be able to use this information on the job?

5. Is there any easy-to-read summary or job aid that I could develop that would be valuable to the participants on the job? (If so, do it.)

Up and Out

Being a trainer is exciting! No other industry is so dedicated to the intellectual and personal growth of both learner and practitioner. Precious few professions offer as many opportunities for the rewarding experience of helping others, self, and an organization at the same time. So, use the tips and techniques in this book to greatest advantage. Your finely honed communication skills allow your participants to absorb and apply more fully the skills and content you present. Remember, if each participant takes away one small thing that can be applied the next day on the job or that night at home with the family, you have been a tremendous success.

Go for it!

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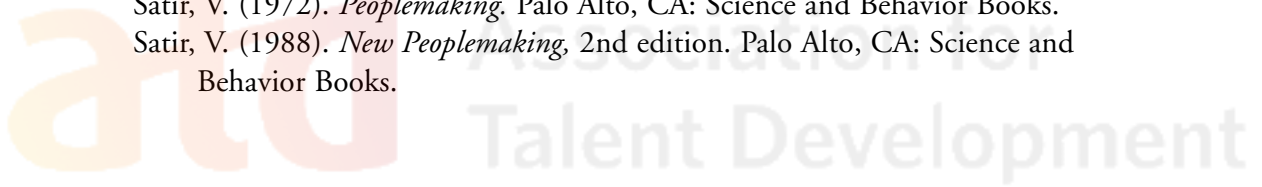
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About the Authors

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Judy Jenings earned her bachelor's degree of arts in psychology from the University of Cincinnati and has worked toward her master's degree in instructional systems technology at Indiana University. As the owner of Meeting Resources Inc., Judy has developed and presented educational programs and workshops for a host of corporate and not-for-profit organizations including Clarian Hospitals, Allison Transmission, General Physics Corporation, and the University of Indianapolis. Her designs include teambuilding, customer service, self-development, and interpersonal effective communications.

Judy was formerly the director of training, communications, and conference planning at VASA of Indianapolis, Indiana, the U.S. headquarters for a European-owned insurance company. Prior to working for VASA, she spent more than 15 years with Allstate Insurance in the training and development field and in line management positions.

Judy earned a lifetime membership with her local ASTD chapter after serving more than a decade on the board including a year as chapter president. She also served for several years on the local chapter boards of Meeting Professionals International, the International Special Events Society, and the Alliance of Meeting Management Companies. She is now a speaker, facilitator, instructional designer, meeting planner, and author working to promote and enhance the practice of quality adult learning.

Linda Malcak

With more than 20 years' experience in the communications field, Linda Malcak has put her degree in speech and theater communications to good use. Starting out in publishing and education, she went on to build her own successful technical writing

and training company in Indianapolis. She currently works full time as an acquisitions editor and writes on a freelance basis as well.

Linda's clients have included Carrier Corporation, Eli Lilly, Roche Diagnostics, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the National Retail Hardware Association, the Indianapolis Public Schools, and Bank One.

She has been active in the Central Indiana Chapter of ASTD, serving the organization as conference chair, secretary, and treasurer. As a member of the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce, she helped to found and then chair the Business Improvement Group, originally organized around the needs of companies to become ISO-9000 certified.

Linda lives in Indianapolis with her husband, Tony, son, Josh, and dog, Midnight.