5 PERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Interacting with people is fundamental to all N2000 management. Whether communicating with a staff member, volunteer, politician, funder, local community group, school children or an angry stakeholder how the N2000 manager presents themselves will underpin the effectiveness of all communications. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in personal communication skills, being honest in the need to learn some new techniques and gain some fresh insights and understanding will enable the N2000 manager to develop positive and constructive relationships and should in the process reduce conflict and gain new supporters.



CHECK POWERPOINT IN TOOLKIT

5.1 NON - VERBAL COMMUNICATION

We communicate as much non-verbally as we do with speech.

- Only 7% of meaning is in the words spoken.
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% is in facial expression.

(source: Albert Mehrabian)

Non-Verbal Communication need to be aware of:

a) Facial expressions
b) Eye contact
c) Interpersonal distance
d) Touch
e) Body orientation and posture
f) Hand and other gestures
g) Your appearance

Looking at each of those in turn.

a) Facial Expressions

These usually convey emotions. There are 6 Universal emotions common in every culture: Learn to distinguish these to pick up the signals given by those with whom you are communicating. Bear in mind too you will also be exhibiting these signals too.

- Surprise
- Fear
- Sadness
- Anger
- Happiness
- Disgust

b) Eye contact

Eye contact shows interest/attraction.

We look more frequently at someone when we're interested, but staring can be un-nerving.

c) Inter-personal Distance

This is the "bubble" we like to have around us. How close do you feel comfortable standing to someone else? People will have preferences, generally depending on how well they know the other person. Circumstances may sometimes lead to changes in this (e.g. living and working in urban areas).

If we are forced to be closer than this e.g. lifts, trains, etc., we tend to use other methods to increase the distance e.g. turning away, avoiding eye contact, etc.

Generally speaking, the comfort zones of the average Westerner are as follows:

- **Intimate zone** – partners & family (up to 45 cm)
- **Personal zone** – friends and group discussions (45cm to 1.2m – about an arm's length)
- **Social zone** – acquaintances and new groups (1.2m to 2.4m)
- **Public zone** – unknown people and large audiences (2.4m upwards)

d) Body Orientation and Postures

Orientation refers to which way we turn our bodies. We turn to people we are interested in. We turn away from those we dislike or aren't interested in

Our posture and orientation can indicate:

- Aggression
- Defensiveness
- Interest
- Tension

and so on...

e) Hand and other gestures

These can give more emphasis to what is said. Examples include: head nodding, moving your hands when you give directions Some are universal, but some are culture dependent. And not all are polite!

f) Para-language

This is how we say things, and includes:

- Pitch
- Stress
- Timing
- Pauses
- Emotional tone of voice
- Accent
- Speech errors (um, err)
- Speed of speech
- Interruptions

Fast speech often indicates anxiety, and slow speech is often assumed to mean low levels of intelligence (not necessarily correctly).

Interruptions are usually natural, but can be forced (butting in) and there are gender differences. Men regularly interrupt more than females.

g) Appearance

We make instant judgements based on appearance – this process is known as ***Impression Formation.***

An informal or untidy appearance will give people the impression you are informal in your work aspects of life ***(Implicit Personality Theory).*** *So, it is wise to dress accordingly. When you first meet someone, the only thing they have to form an impression of you is your appearance. You can generally start smart and become casual (e.g. remove a tie or jacket), but not the reverse!*

Read the poem below. It shows how we have impressions of older people – but they may not be correct.

When I Am Old (Jenny Joseph)

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat that doesn't go, and doesn't suit me,
And I shall spend my pension
on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals,
and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I am tired,
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells,
And run my stick along the public railings,
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens,
And learn to spit.
You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat,
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go,
Or only bread and pickle for a week,
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats
and things in boxes.
But now we must have clothes that keep us dry,
And pay our rent and not swear in the street,
And set a good example for the children.
We will have friends to dinner and read the papers.
But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me
are not too shocked and surprised,
When suddenly I am old
and start to wear purple!

In summary…

All these will make a difference to your communication as a N2000 manager. Being aware of these as a both a sender and receiver of communication signals will enable you to "read" situations better, whether they be one –to –one or group meetings and respond and adjust the communications accordingly.

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Interpersonal distance
- Touch
- Body orientation and posture
- Hand and other gestures
- Your appearance
- And words of course!

We usually do all this naturally, but think about these if things aren't going according to plan. Fake it if you have to! If you're not a natural communicator, make use of these ideas and pretend if necessary.

5.2 ACTIVE LISTENING AND EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Often when we consider communications we immediately think of “talking”, when infact listening is the first and most important skill. As a N2000 manager, the ability to really listen to the concerns expressed by stakeholder, or to ideas and suggestions being given by staff and volunteers, will go a long way to develop good and effective relationship. In so doing the whole management of the N2000 site can be built on mutual respect and understanding.

Active listening means accurately listening to what is being said,

and showing we’re paying attention to what is being said.

How do we show we’re listening during a conversation? You created a list as a group, but here are some ideas:

- Concentrate – give the conversation your undivided attention
- Resist the temptation to interrupt
- Hear the tone of the speakers voice as the words being used
- Demonstrate you are listening by making ‘continuity noises’ e.g. em, yes, really, aha, etc.
- Be aware of your own facial expressions
- Face the speaker squarely
- Adopt an open and relaxed posture
- Lean slightly towards the speaker
- Make good eye contact (but not too much!)
- Ask open questions to get the speaker to elaborate on particular issues

Not listening *is far more common in many societies than* ***listening***

What most of us do…

Very often we only listen to part of what other people say. What is heard are often those parts which confirm the listeners own opinion and views. Some of the things that get in the way of accurate listening are:

- Rehearsing in your head what you are going to say next
- Trying to impress the other person
- Judging what the other person is saying as irrelevant, inconsistent, etc.

So Basically, we hear what we want to hear, not what is actually said!

Effective Questioning

In order to progress a conversation or to improve understanding, asking question of the individual or group may be needed. Imagine you are interviewing a landowner, an recreation user, or leading a community workshop, asking the right question will elicit more information about what may be behind an issue or indeed reveal more than was first assumed.

// Use open questions - they get results

Open questions minimise the temptation to make assumptions To understand more precisely what the speaker wants to tell you Reflecting what the person has said can also help

Open Questions begin with:

Who were you working with?

What are you going to do about that?

Where exactly did this happen?

When do you think you could do this?

How do you think this happened?

Why is that important to you?

Which would you prefer?

***//* Reflection is a useful technique**

It allows the speaker to keep talking when you have no specific question to ask, or as an encouragement when the speaker is shy or nervous.

Reflection is where you repeat the statement just made by the speaker, as a question*. For example: Speaker: " Then I went over to check it was working…" - Questioner: "You went over to check it was working…?"*

***//* Closed Questions**

A closed question, at the extreme, is one which can only be answered "Yes" or "No".

Closed questions are useful if you want to check out specific pieces of information, or to check if you have something correct.

In summary

- Listen carefully
- Look like you're listening
- Try to use open questions
- Be careful about interrupting
- Remember Active listeners spend 70% of their time listening and only 30% of their time talking

5.3 PRESENTATION SKILLS

See powerpoint in Toolkit

Moving away from more intimate communication skills the N2000 manager may often have to impart a lot of information to a larger number of people. One way is to get that across is through a speech, or presentation. A presentation can be done with or without images and the length of time, the confidence of the speaker, their skills in delivering the speech and creating imagery through words are all aspects to consider. A good orator painting images with words can be more effective than a poorly presented powerpoint.

Don't let fear put you off doing a good presentation! Many people consider presenting in public to be one of the most terrifying things in life. The fear can be overcome! Start with planning…

Planning

- Why are you doing the talk? Be clear about your purpose
- Find out how big your audience is likely to be & what sort of group
- Make notes about your subject
- Don't write your talk word for word
- Use small pieces of paper and number them
- PowerPoint has a notes & timing feature which may help
- Time your talk & practice it
- Then practice it again

Think of Threes

- Tell people what you're going to say
- Tell them
- Tell them what you've said

5.4 PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES

"He was looking up into the sky all the time

he was speaking and Alice thought this decidedly uncivil" (Lewis Carroll)

Don't' forget the personal communication skills. They are just as relevant here! So do look as if you are engaged with the audience.

Some useful technics

- **Pace of Delivery** – not too fast or too slow, and vary it from time to time. Pause sometimes.
- **Vary your style** – don't just stand and talk all the time – get the participants to participate!
- **Move about** – you do not need to be fixed to the spot. Walk up to people occasionally.
- **Vary the pitch of your voice** – as you would in normal conversation
- **Use notes** – write brief notes on cards and number them. Don't write your speech word for word then read it – it won't flow very well.
- **Avoid annoying habits**...jangling keys/coins, fiddling with things, saying um at the start of every sentence…
- **Props can be used to get people's attention**, but should not be heavily relied upon. They

should also be to hand, so you don't have to interrupt what you're doing to use them.

Teaching aids

- Flip chart for diagrams, pictures, key points
- Tranparancies/powerpoint - serve the same purpose (more permanent, better for a large audience)
- Powerpoint – can work for you if you use well.-but can be awful if used badly.
- Demonstration - get your audience involved

POWERPOINT Advantages	Disadvantages
Quick, easy & simple	Can be tedious
Prepare in advance	Not very dynamic
Good for large audience	Easy to overload with information
Can include pictures & graphics easily	Be careful with animations
Something to look at	Tendency to read word for word

Do's

- Take a deep breath
- Speak clearly
- Make small cards to remind yourself of topics (number them!...that way if you drop them…you can reset quickly!)
- Be aware of where your audience is - are you facing all of them?
- Smile, have fun
- Be yourself and project your personality
- Remember - no-one knows how you feel or what you think
- Remember - The audience is on your side!

Don'ts

- 'Don't grunt', said Alice; 'that's not at all the proper way of expressing yourself' "
- Lewis Carroll
- Rush what you're trying to say – SLOW DOWN
- Read off a sheet of paper word for word
- Fiddle with things - its irritating!
- Use inappropriate language for your audience
- Panic

In Summary…

- Most talks go according to plan
- But, you must actually plan unless you are very experienced
- You have the support of your audience
- Most common mistakes are avoidable
- The world won't end if it does go wrong – just correct yourself and carry on

5.5 GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK



Feedback is a way of helping another person to consider changing behaviour. It is communication to a person (or a group) which gives that person information about how he/she affects others. Feedback helps an individual keep behaviour "on target" and thus better achieve goals.

In a N2000 situation a manager may find they need to give feedback to an individual or a group, for example after a consultation exercise, this can be difficult and if done badly can undermine relationships thereafter.

To be effective feedback should focus on:

- Clear and Specific points
- Behaviour that can be changed – allow room for action
- Observed facts, not supposed intentions
- What you saw / felt, not judgement
- The most important points
- Agreed purpose / ground rules
- Good aspects ..... as well as areas for improvement
- Giving value to the receiver, not release for the giver!

In more detail

Feedback is descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing one's own reaction, it leaves the individual free to use it directly or to use it as he/she sees fit. By avoiding evaluative language, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.

It is specific rather than general. To be told that one is "dominating" will probably not be as useful as to be told that "Just now when we were deciding the issue you did not listen to what others said and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you".

It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.

It is directed toward behaviour which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some short-coming over which he has no control.

It is solicited, rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question which those observing can answer.

It is well timed. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behaviour (depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.)

It is checked to ensure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

When feedback is given in a group, both giver and receiver have opportunity to check with others in the group the accuracy of the feedback. *Is this one impression or an impression shared by others?* Feedback then, is a way of giving help; it is a corrective mechanism for the individual who wants to learn how well his behaviour matches his attentions: and it is a means for establishing one's identity.

Care needs to be taken with offering feedback, so someone is encouraged to change and develop. You are revealing information to someone about themselves which they may not have been aware of, so care needs to be taken

Another helpful model is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (below). The model indicates that the needs at the bottom need to be met before those at the top. So, if someone is cold and hungry, they're probably not in the best mood to hear feedback on their performance. This is also important when planning meetings , workshop and larger scale events associated with the N2000 site, take care of human needs first before expecting to engage in effective and meaningful communications else all your efforts are gone to waste

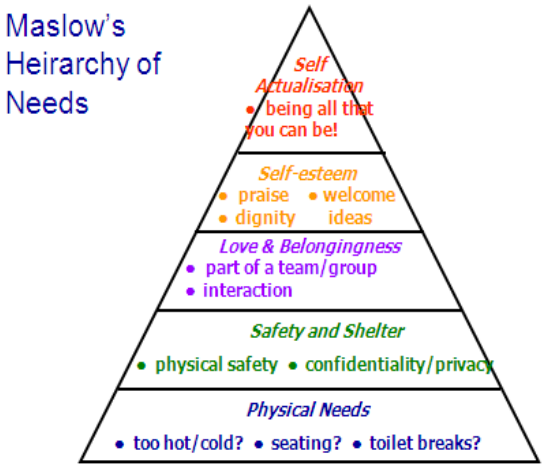


Figure 9 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Asking for feedback

We tend to ask for feedback quite infrequently. It may also be that we often see unsolicited compliments as positive feedback. But they are.

Receiving Feedback

We are often reluctant to receive feedback in case it is negative. It helps though if we can do some planning in advance.

Planning

- Think about your ideas and work beforehand
- Arrange a time/place where you won't be disturbed, and don't leave it too long after the event
- Ask for help/solutions with specific difficulties
- Be clear about the kind of help you want (or don't want!).
- Be open to hearing the feedback – it's pointless otherwise
- Listen actively

In receiving feedback

- breathe!
- listen carefully (remember active listening !)
- ask questions for clarity (remember effective questioning)
- acknowledge the feedback
- acknowledge valid points
- take time to sort out what you heard

Receiving Feedback - Try not to

- Take it personally, or get hurt/angry
- Interrupt with reasons if the feedback is "negative"
- Dismiss the points if you don't agree with them
- If you don't agree – get another point of view
- Remember negative points forever! Remember the positive ones instead
- And don't dismiss positive comments

In Summary

- Feedback focusses on behaviours and actions which can be changed, not personalities
- Learn to give effective feedback
- Learn to receive feedback
- Understand timing is important for both of these
- Weigh up comments sensibly – negatives do not "mean more" than positives There are links to additional information about feedback in the **TOOLKIT.**

5.6 COMMUNICATING ASSERTIVELY

For many N2000 managers there may be a concern that if they assert themselves others will think of their behavior as aggressive. There is a difference between being assertive and aggressive. Assertive people can still state their opinions, while still being respectful of others

What would you do if:

- Your workmate asked for help on a project when you already had too much to do?
- One of your colleagues was late for a meeting, again?
- You were criticised for some work you had put a lot of effort into?
- You were bullied by someone you regularly crossed paths with?

We tend to adopt one of four behaviour styles, Aggressive, Passive, Passive-Aggressive or Assertive. Most of us fall naturally into one or other of the first three. Most of us have to learn to become assertive. It is something we need to work at and practice.

Aggressive

Putting yourself first, at the expense of others or trying to control other people's behaviour. Aggressive behaviour involves expressing and pursuing your rights at the expense of others, which creates the impression of disrespect for the other person. In effect, you are getting your own way, no matter what other people think. This, in turn, can lead to people having less respect for you, or even being frightened of you.

Passive

Putting others first, at your expense. Passive behaviour (or submissive) is when you allow others to violate your rights by regarding their needs, opinions and rights as more important than your own. This shows a lack of respect for your own needs and can lead to feelings of hurt, anxiety and anger.

Passive-Aggressive

Appearing to put others first, but actually having an underlying aggression. This is when you appear to be calm and detached, and possibly innocent and helpless. Again the person allows their needs to be violated. However, the person also has aggressive tendencies and whose behaviour tends to have a vicious edge. Although they tend not to directly attack, they will find another way of doing undermining the needs, rights and feelings of others. This tends to lead to feelings of guilt and manipulation in the other party.

Assertive

Expressing your feelings, thoughts and needs without threatening others. Assertiveness is the direct and honest communication of your opinions, feelings, needs, and rights in a way that does not threaten the personal rights of others. It involves standing up for your own rights, while acknowledging the rights of others, and working towards a win-win solution.

Assertiveness can help you improve your communication skills, self-esteem, and decision-making ability. Feelings and ideas can be expressed in an honest way, allowing relationships to become much more genuine. The respect you show for other people can lead to others respecting you more. Assertiveness also gives you more control over your environment, reducing anxiety in difficult situations. Being assertive allows you to be yourself.

At the most basic level, assertiveness can be a simple expression of your beliefs, feelings, or opinions. For example; "I feel upset". Sometimes this is all you need to say.

Being assertive

- A direct and honest communication of your needs, feelings and rights
- Expressed in a way which doesn't threaten the rights of others
- Is focussed on specifics & involves negotiation
- Make use of "I" when speaking
- Increases your level of control
- Tends to earn more respect from others

Tips for being more assertive

- **Deliver your message directly** to the intended recipient.
- Use statements that make what you want, think, and feel as clear as possible. *For example, "I want to…" or "I feel…"*
- **Own your message**. Rather than saying, "You should…" try saying, "I'd really like it if you…"
- **Be specific and objective** when describing the behaviour or situation.
- Avoid "why" questions to further reduce the likelihood of the other person becoming defensive.
- **Avoid becoming emotional** when describing how it makes you feel. It may also be appropriate to give some explanation as to why the situation or other person's behaviour makes you feel that way.
- **Be specific** about the action required from the other person, taking into account the rights, needs and feelings of the other person. If necessary and appropriate, clearly describe the consequences of the other person's behaviour not changing.
- **Do not be apologetic about your feelings, rights or opinions.** Say "no" to unreasonable requests, also without being apologetic. Even offering an explanation is strictly optional.
- **Only address one issue at a time**

- **Maintain eye contact** (if culturally appropriate) and use tone of voice and body language to reinforce your message.
- Display confident body language, think about how you stand, walk or sit.

Some known techniques

The broken record

- Keep repeating, in different ways, what you want
- Identify your goal
- Deflect any irrelevant arguments
- Keep repeating your statement
- Match your body language to your statements

Saying No

- If your initial reaction is No, then go with it
- Practice saying No
- Ensure you actually say No
- Ask for extra time if you want to think a bit more
- A direct No is better than someone who doesn't really want to be there
- More known techniques

Disarming Anger

- Acknowledge when someone is angry
- Explain you want address the issue
- Get them to sit, and speak normally
- Listen actively
- Try to solve the problem
- Say what you could do differently

Negative & Positive Enquiry

- Turn a negative into a positive enquiry
- Not, "why do you get at me for leaving work at 5?"
- Try "I need to understand. What is about my finishing time that concerns you?"

In summary…

- Being assertive is a balanced adult approach to communication
- You should try to avoid being passive or aggressive
- Watch out for those behaviours in others, and learn to avoid them
- You feelings and needs are important – and so are other people's There are links to more information about assertiveness in the TOOLKIT.