

CSP E-Lesson 15, Fall 2008

Words of Wisdom: "My clients need to understand precisely what I am saying and why I am saying it. I have to be careful not to send mixed messages."

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That's Not What He Said

Winnie's face has a shocked look when she asks Caleb, "Did you hear Adam at lunch today? I couldn't believe he called Miranda 'dumb!'"

"What are you talking about? He didn't call Miranda dumb. He just said he thought her idea for advertising the school fair was confusing." Caleb gives Winnie a quizzical look.

"I thought he was calling her 'dumb'. We all know he wants to be president of student council so it will look good on his college application, and Miranda is his only competition," Winnie says knowingly.

"Well, that doesn't mean he called her 'dumb!'" Caleb sounds annoyed at his friend.

"The way he smiled and leaned back in his chair, he looked like he was enjoying it when he criticized her." Winnie raises her eyebrows as if she is challenging Caleb to disagree.

"I think you got the wrong message, Winnie. I have to run or I'll be late," Caleb says as he picks up his books and jogs down the sidewalk to the school entrance.

Communicating so that what you mean to say is what the listener hears requires attention to your words, tone of voice, and body language. Think about the last time someone misunderstood what you were saying. Why do you think the misunderstanding occurred and how did it affect you?

What Was That You Said?

You have been communicating since you were a child. But are you always successful in getting your message across? Are you surprised when someone misinterprets or misunderstands what you're trying to communicate? Maybe you're sending a *mixed* message.

A mixed message is one that confuses the listener because your words say one thing, but your facial expression, tone of voice, body language, or actions say something different. Think of a classmate who says, "I failed that test, too," but doesn't seem upset, after you worry aloud that you didn't know the test answers. Is he trying to make you feel good, or does he really think he failed the test?

Here are other examples of mixed messages:

"Mom, I can't take out the garbage now; I'm too tired to do anything," says a teen who walks away while texting friends on his cell phone.

"I'd love to invite you to my party," says a smiling classmate, "but my parents say I can't have any more people." Later, you hear he invited others after talking with you.

"We can't miss our client's deadline. The shipment has to go out today," says your boss who then fails to complete the paperwork so you can get the shipment out today.

A co-worker tells you, "I have too much to do. The boss needs to add a person," yet you see the co-worker surfing Facebook™ pages and texting throughout the day.

What do you think the following messages mean?

1. Your boss directs you to "give your report to me ASAP" but, when you turn the report in, he shrugs and says, "I'll look at it when I can." _____
2. A co-worker says, "Will you take over for me? I have a terrible headache, and I'm going to lie down in the employee lounge," but you find her chatting and smiling with another person when you go to the lounge later. _____
3. Your boyfriend or girlfriend says, "I'm mad at you," while smiling and touching your arm." _____

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

If you saw a person with terror on his face running down the street and yelling, "There's nothing to be afraid of," would you look around for danger or keep walking? Which message would be most impressive, his words or his actions? These actions are called "non-verbal communication."

Non-verbal messages make up about 93% of all communication and are more powerful than verbal messages. You can use non-verbal communication to make your words mean more to others.

Look at this list of several forms of non-verbal communication. Name three more ways you could communicate non-verbally to get a message across better.

1. Use expressions, eye movements, gestures and posture.
2. Show emotion through the tone and volume of your voice.
3. Time a message so it arrives at the best moment. (For example, a helpful suggestion today may feel like a criticism tomorrow if damage occurs tonight.)
4. Use objects to enhance the message, for example, a briefcase to promote your business image.
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Watch Your Tone of Voice

Think of all the different ways you can say, "No." With one word, you can communicate anger, humor, surprise, sympathy, authority, and many more emotions. Your tone of voice can also communicate praise, sarcasm, joy, doubt, ridicule, amazement, fear, defensiveness, aggression, pleasure, guilt, anxiety, self-confidence, arrogance, scorn, enthusiasm, frustration, supportiveness, hostility, coldness, warmth, criticism, comfort, and more.

Form a small group and sit in a circle with members facing each other. Choose one statement from the list below and take turns repeating it, with each person using a different tone of voice to communicate

Watch Your Tone of Voice (Continued)

a different message. For example, one person may say, "You're getting a promotion," in a tone that communicates excitement and happiness. Another may say, "You're getting a promotion," in a tone that sounds jealous.

After each interpretation, ask group members to identify the emotion the speaker intended to communicate. Did the tone of voice, the facial expressions, eye contact, or posture give non-verbal clues?

Messages to deliver and interpret

1. "Please leave me alone."
2. "Sorry, you didn't get the assignment."
3. "You passed the test."
4. "That looks fattening."
5. "You're really good at your job."
6. "Maybe you need some time off."
7. "Do you think *Gwen's* outfit is appropriate for the office?"
8. "The boss needs to know about this."
9. "Get this package out right away."
10. "Make sure you're on time tomorrow. It's a big day!"
11. "Are you ready to get started? We're wasting time."
12. "Watch what you are doing. This is dangerous work."
13. "Come help me."
14. "Thank you for your help."

Note: Your tone may not always sound the way you intended, so you'll need to clarify what you meant in order to avoid misunderstandings. "I know I sound angry but it's not personal. It's not because of you; I'm just anxious for the proposal to be completed on time."

The Messages We Send

The way you look, the car you drive, and the people you associate with are other forms of non-verbal communication. In the work world, it will be very important for you to deliver the message that you are responsible and professional. Your clothes, jewelry, hair cut, shoes, cologne and other forms of appearance all deliver a message about you. Even though people can change their minds about you after they know you better, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. The first impression you communicate to employment interviewers, customers, supervisors, and co-workers should be the best one possible.

Mystery Workers

What message do the following workers send? From a description of their *non-verbal communication only*, what first impression do you get? Would you consider these workers to be highly reliable, somewhat reliable, somewhat unreliable, or unreliable? Circle your answer.

When you finish, go to the next page and learn more about each person. Does the extra information change your opinion?

1. Melinda, age 17, adds one more layer of makeup, slips a shiny jacket over her short skirt, adds a pair of big earrings and a long necklace, and sprays herself generously with perfume before heading out for her first day on the job as a nursery school aide.

Melinda is: Highly reliable, Somewhat reliable, Somewhat unreliable, Unreliable

2. Jack, at 18, is a new loading dock employee for Martin Furniture. He wears gloves to move furniture, puts on a fresh uniform each day, and trims his short facial hair before leaving home.

Jack is: Highly reliable, Somewhat reliable, Somewhat unreliable, Unreliable

3. Samuel, 25, guns his motorcycle before he parks in a vacant space, makes sure his pants hang low on his hips, runs his hand through his long hair and starts up the steps to the company where he has been hired to answer technical questions for customers about the company's software.

Samuel is: Highly reliable, Somewhat reliable, Somewhat unreliable, Unreliable

The Messages We Send (Continued)

4. Shenika, at 18, irons her well-worn, but still presentable, skirt and blouse before dressing, adds an attractive belt, braids her hair, applies light makeup, and puts on delicate earrings before driving to the office where she is a receptionist.

Shenika is: Highly reliable, Somewhat reliable, Somewhat unreliable, Unreliable

Mystery Workers Revealed

Melinda was valedictorian of her high school class, named student of the month four times, and has lived with her young brother and aging grandfather since her parents were killed in a car crash five years ago when she was 13. She is saving money to go to community college. Does this second impression of Melinda change your opinion of her? _____ Do you have non-verbal communication advice for Melinda as she begins her career? _____

Jack was released from a juvenile detainment center four months ago after serving two years. While there, he learned wood working as a skill. He values beautiful pieces of furniture and wants to start a furniture-making business one day. He never misses a day of work. Does this second impression of Jack change your opinion of him? _____ Do you have non-verbal communication advice for Jack as he begins his career? _____

Samuel saved money for six years so he could buy a motorcycle. It took a long time because he gives money to his single mom for food and clothes for his four little brothers and sisters. He's continued to live at home so he can help his mom with raising the family. People in his low-income neighborhood rely on him to help them because he's so responsible and mild-mannered. Does this second impression of Samuel change your opinion of him? _____ Do you have non-verbal communication advice for Samuel? _____

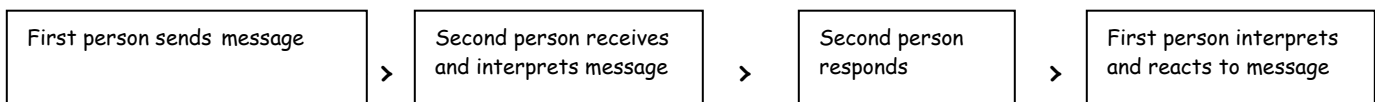
The Messages We Send (Continued)

Shenika learned about fashion in a high school class. She spends all of her money on singing lessons because she hopes to have a singing career, so she can't afford new clothes. She took the office job in the theatre department of a local university because it helps her pay for tuition in an early enrollment university class as she finishes high school. Everyone at work goes to her when they need something. Does this second impression of Shenika change your opinion of her? _____ Do you have non-verbal communication advice for Shenika as she begins her career? _____

Message Sent, Wrong Message Received

Communication involves at least two people who send messages back and forth. That seems simple enough. What could go wrong?

The biggest reason people misunderstand each other is that they interpret what others mean to say. Their own bias or baggage goes into their interpretation. For example, a person with a negative outlook will interpret a comment differently from another with a positive outlook.⁸



Read about Sandra, a waitress. Then explain what you think went wrong with her simple communication.

Sandra, who works the evening dinner shift, calls in sick at the last minute. That doesn't give her boss enough time to get someone to fill in, and she senses her boss is not sympathetic.

Sandra's communication: "I won't make it to work tonight. I think I have the flu."

Message Sent, Wrong Message Received (Continued)

What Sandra thinks: ("I can't afford to miss work, so I'll wait until the last minute to call in case I feel better. I know they need me.")

What the boss hears: ("I don't care about you or my co-workers. I don't have enough consideration to call in time for you to find a replacement.")

The boss's communication: "This is awfully late notice, Sandra, how am I supposed to cover for you?"

What the boss thinks: ("I'm under pressure; the other servers will be upset and have a hard time covering for Sandra. We may have angry customers because of the slow service.")

What Sandra hears: ("I don't have any sympathy for you. I'm only worried about my own problem.")

Sandra's communication: "Do you want me to come in sick?"

What Sandra thinks: ("If I have to go to work sick, I will.")

What the boss hears: ("I'm annoyed and resentful now because you're upset.")

The boss's communication: "Of course not. Call me tomorrow and let me know how you feel."

What the boss thinks: ("I can't have a food server passing germs to her co-workers and customers.")

What Sandra hears: ("I'm fed up with you and don't want to talk about it any further.")

Explain what you think went wrong with this simple communication. _____

Rewrite the dialog demonstrating how Sandra and her boss could have avoided the misunderstandings.

Sandra: _____

The Boss: _____

Sandra: _____

The Boss: _____

Did You Hear What I Thought I Said?

When you speak, do people hear what you intend them to hear? Or do they hear something else? Do your verbal and non-verbal messages agree? Remember, your nonverbal messages such as body language, facial expression, and tone of voice usually outweigh verbal messages.

Choose a partner and then select one of the following situations to role play for the class for thirty seconds. Before starting the role play, take a few minutes for each partner to imagine how the character he or she is playing will think and feel. Do not rehearse together ahead of time, so you can react honestly to your partner's statements and responses. (Note: Don't worry about reaching the goal; the important part is communicating so you aren't misinterpreted.)

After your role play, ask your class to (1) describe what they heard, (2) identify the strengths and weaknesses of each person's communication, and (3) make suggestions for improvement.

Situation 1: Trust Me

Ask a parent for permission to attend a party and stay out past your curfew.

Goal: Receive permission to stay out late

Intention: Communicate that you are responsible and trustworthy

Situation 2: Sleepy Head

Explain to your neighbor that you didn't show up to baby sit and didn't call to cancel because you fell asleep and didn't wake up in time.

Goal: Maintain a good working relationship with your neighbor

Intention: Communicate your regret over the incident and your desire to make up for your mistake

Situation 3: Snap, Crackle, and Pop

Tell a co-worker that her loud gum chewing is annoying and distracting to the people working around her.

Goal: Get the co-worker to stop chewing gum loudly

Intention: Achieve your goal without making her defensive

Did You Hear What I Thought I Said? (Continued)

Situation 4: Service Please

Tell a subordinate at work that he is on probation because a customer called and complained about the service he provided.

Goal: Make the subordinate understand that his job depends on providing good customer service

Intention: Help the subordinate improve his performance

Situation 5: Litter Bugs

Tell a small group of neighborhood children that their habit of leaving empty food wrappers and water bottles lying around in public places is unacceptable.

Goal: Get the children to change their habits

Intention: Increase the children's awareness and make them want to stop littering

Classmates' Evaluation

List three details of what was said.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List strong verbal elements that were effective: _____

List weak verbal elements that need improvement: _____

Did You Hear What I Thought I Said? (Continued)

List five strong non-verbal elements that were effective:

List five weak non-verbal elements that need improvement:

List suggestions for improvement:
