



Tamara Tupper

Improving Communication Skills and Resolving Communication Issues

This course will help improve communication skills and learn how to resolve communication issues

What Is Communication, and Why Does It Sometimes Fail?

Communication Mistakes: Rectifying and Clarifying

How to Remove Five Common Communication Barriers

Working With Different Communication Styles

Becoming an Expert Verbal Communicator

What Is Communication, and Why Does It Sometimes Fail?



Tamara Tupper

Introduction

A nervous employee with shaky hands asks for a raise. A teenager texts a friend to meet her at her locker. A baby points to his mouth in a busy restaurant, signaling he's hungry.

All these familiar scenes are displays of the communication process in action. They're examples of how we use various mediums such as speech, written words, and physical expressions to **send** and **receive** information—or **messages**—to one another.

If we speak clearly, share our messages through appropriate mediums, and listen attentively, the communication process usually works great. But as you've probably already experienced, that doesn't always happen. Sometimes the sender gives unclear information, the message isn't delivered through the most effective medium, or the receiver struggles to understand the details and fails to seek clarification. As a result, the communication process can break down, and there's a misunderstanding.

In this lesson, you'll learn how and why this happens. First, we'll demonstrate how communication is a process involving a sender, a message, and a receiver. You'll then learn why

communication can fail if that process breaks down.



In this video, we define the communication process, which involves a sender, a message, and a receiver. We also demonstrate how communication can fail if that process breaks down.

What Is Communication?

Communication is the process of sharing information between two or more people. Among other things, this information can take the form of requests, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and questions. The key word here is *process*. Communication is a series of steps—a process—taken by both a sender and a receiver to exchange information.

The Communication Process

The communication process involves three primary elements: a **sender**, a **message**, and a **receiver**. Click through these cards to learn more.

Step 1

Sender

Communication starts with the sender. As the person who delivers the information, the sender decides what to share, who to share it with, and how to deliver the message.

If you're the sender, you'll be most effective if your message is clear and straightforward. For example, consider how you might be more effective if you say: "*I need this report by 3 p.m. today*" instead of "*I need this report soon.*"

Step 2

Message

The message is the information the sender shares. You can deliver your message through various mediums—which are forms of verbal, nonverbal, and written communication.

- **Verbal communication** involves spoken words, such as phone calls.
- **Nonverbal communication** involves wordless messages, such as hand gestures.
- **Written communication** involves text-based exchanges, such as emails.

Your message works best when you use the most appropriate verbal, nonverbal, or written medium for the message. For example, think about how you might have an easier time understanding a complicated recipe if the message is written out instead of spoken aloud.

Step 3

Receiver

The receiver is the person who *receives* the message. As the receiver, it's up to you to interpret the information and, hopefully, arrive at the same understanding as the sender.

As the receiver, you might need to decode a lot of details, so resist the urge to let your mind wander. You'll be most effective if you listen, read, and watch closely.

To improve your effectiveness, you can also send a message back to the sender. That is called giving **feedback**, and it allows you to explain your interpretation of the information and seek clarification. As a bonus, by responding back to the sender with feedback, you'll help the sender to understand how successful they were at conveying their message.

Summary

So, communication is a process. First, a **sender** *delivers* a **message** through a verbal, non-verbal, or written medium. Then, a **receiver** *receives* that message and interprets the information.

Root Causes of Communication Fails

If there's an issue with any part of the communication process—whether it involves the sender, the message, or the receiver—the communication may fail. Explore the list below to learn some of the more common reasons why communication can break down.

1

The sender is unclear. If the sender delivers an ambiguous, vague, or confusing message, the receiver might leave with the wrong interpretation. For example, consider how you might interpret this message from your boss: *“The project is due next week.”* If your boss means “Monday,” but you think he means “Friday,” the communication has failed.

2

The message isn't delivered through the most effective medium. Depending on your message, different mediums will work better than others. For example, you may intend to add a bit of levity to an email by including sarcasm. However, an email doesn't convey your tone of voice and body language. As a result, the receiver may misinterpret your playful sentence as something much more serious.



3

The message simply isn't delivered. Have you ever had an email delivered to the spam folder by mistake? Or a text message show up two days later? If a message is never received, communication breaks down. That is why important messages should be conveyed in person or over the phone.

4

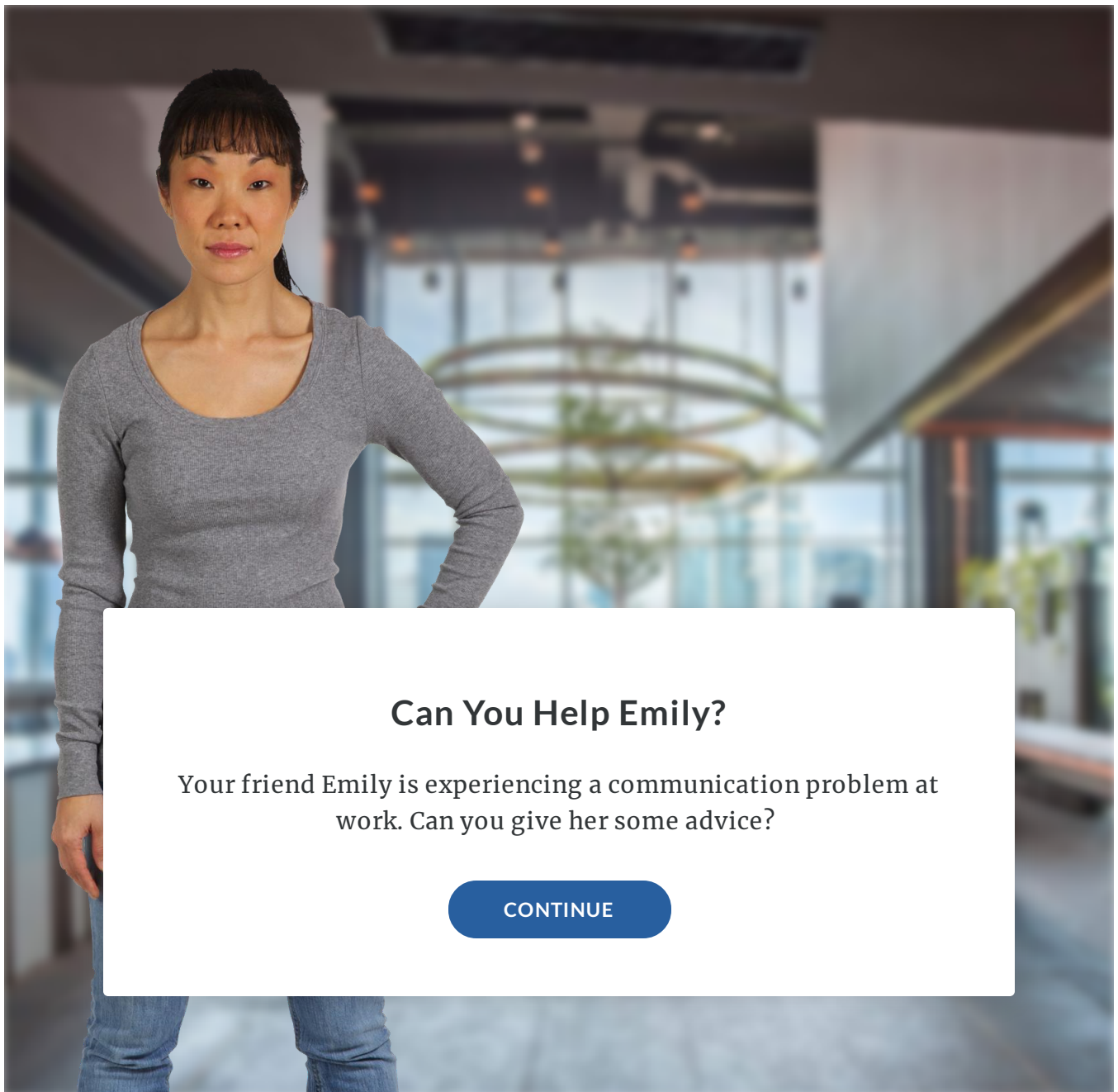
The receiver is distracted. Have you ever tried to give instructions to a teenager while they're immersed in a video game? Or wondered if the coworker who's staring at her computer screen while saying "*uh-huh*" is really understanding your directions? Even if your message is clear, the receiver could miss important details (or all the details!) if they're distracted.

5

The receiver can't understand the information. You just received a text message from a coworker, and it's full of acronyms you've never seen before. You conduct a web search to identify the acronyms but come up empty. This moment is a great opportunity for you, as the receiver, to seek clarification from the sender.

"The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through."

Sydney J. Harris



Can You Help Emily?

Your friend Emily is experiencing a communication problem at work. Can you give her some advice?

CONTINUE

Scene 1 Slide 1

Continue → Next Slide



My boss just called me about a new project, but his directions seem incomplete and unclear. What should I do?

1

Start working on what you can and don't waste any time. Your boss can provide more instructions when he reviews your work later.

2

Call your boss back right away. Seek clarification by asking questions about anything you don't understand.

3

There's nothing you can do. This isn't your fault. The communication process failed because the sender was unclear.

Scene 1 Slide 2

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide

Give Feedback

If you're unable to interpret a message, ask for clarification by giving feedback and sending a message of your own. That will help you confirm that you and the sender are on the same page.

START OVER



Scene 1 Slide 3

Continue → End of Scenario

Summary

Let's review what we've learned. Communication is the process of sharing messages between two or more people.

As **senders** of information, we share our **messages** through spoken words, writing, and nonverbal cues. As **receivers**, we decode these messages, attempt to make sense of them, and potentially respond back with a message of our own in the form of feedback.

For the communication process to work, both the sender and the receiver must interpret the message in the same way. When there is a disconnect between the **sender**, the **message**, or the **receiver**, the communication process breaks down.

This breakdown is likely to happen if:

- The sender delivers a vague or unclear message.
- The message isn't delivered through the most effective medium.
- The message doesn't make it to the receiver.
- The receiver is distracted.
- The receiver misunderstands the information and doesn't give the sender feedback.



Sender tip. The next time you send a message, try placing yourself in the receiver's shoes. If you were receiving this message (instead of sending it), how would you answer the following two questions: "Is the message clear and straightforward?" and "What's my overall interpretation of this message?"

Communication Mistakes: Rectifying and Clarifying



Tamara Tupper

Introduction

We've all experienced miscommunication. As speakers, we may say the wrong words and confuse or offend others. As listeners, we might misunderstand or mishear a message. In these situations, we can improve our communication by rectifying and clarifying.

Rectifying is correcting a mistake. Clarifying is making something clearer. By rectifying what we've said, we can backtrack and rephrase our message. By asking for clarification on what we've heard, we can get to the bottom line.

This lesson explains how to improve your communication skills by rectifying and clarifying. We'll look at why these techniques are important, and we'll describe how to use them effectively as speakers and as listeners.



Watch this video to learn why rectifying and clarifying are important and how to use these communication techniques effectively.

Why Rectifying Is Important as a Speaker

Sometimes, communication gaps happen because we misspeak. Maybe we used the wrong words, gave a confusing example, or said something we didn't mean and now regret. Mistakes happen. What matters is how we correct them.

We can rectify our errors by speaking up and being honest. We'll need to pause, backpedal, and rephrase.

Rectifying is about damage control. By owning up to our communication blunders, we can recover.

4 Steps for Rectifying Your Communication

So, how do you rectify a verbal mistake? Don't panic. Here are a few steps you can take to correct the problem.

1

Apologize and admit you've made a mistake. First, apologize and own up to your mistake. Be transparent and honest. If you've offended someone, say: *"I'm sorry, that came out wrong."* If you've given false information, correct yourself: *"I apologize, I misspoke earlier."* The only way to rectify a communication mistake is to say something. By taking ownership and giving a sincere apology, you'll prevent the problem from escalating.

2

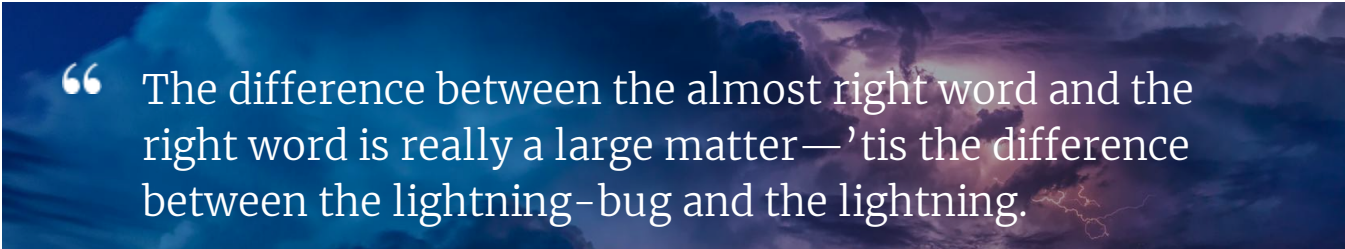
Don't make excuses. Focus on correcting the problem, not placing blame. Phrases such as *"You weren't listening," "That's not what I meant,"* or *"He gave me the wrong information,"* don't fix the problem. Don't make excuses. They rarely make you look better, and they can quickly make a positive conversation turn negative.

3

Correct and clarify your message. After you've apologized, you'll then want to correct and clarify your message. Give more details, expand on your points, and make sure everyone is clear before moving on. As you rectify the mistake, capture your listener's attention with phrases such as: *"Let me clarify that."* and *"Allow me to rephrase."*

4

Repeat the correct message. You want your listeners to leave with the right takeaway. If they've heard one message that's wrong and one that's right, they might confuse the two. Repeat the correct information, and you'll remove any doubt: *"Again, let's meet at 12 p.m. today, please."*



“ The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.”

Rectifying a Communication Mistake

You're in a company meeting and disagree with something a coworker shared. You accidentally blurt out: "*That's an awful idea!*" To avoid hurt feelings, what can you say to rectify this communication mistake?

☐

"I'm sorry. I've had a rough morning and am not thinking properly."

☐

"I'm sorry, that came out wrong. What I mean is that it's a nice thought, but it might not work because ..."

SUBMIT

Why Clarification Is Important as a Listener

As listeners, we can't always rely on a speaker to rectify their mistakes. Even when we're listening actively, a speaker may mumble their words, leave out key details, speak too quickly, or use a phrase we don't understand.

Part of effective listening is seeking clarification when we're confused. That means giving the sender feedback and explaining our interpretation of their message. When we ask for clarification, we check our understanding, fill in the communication gaps, and remove doubt.

3 Steps to Seek Clarification

Click through this step-by-step process to see how you can ask for clarification and remove misunderstandings.

Step 1

Admit You Don't Understand

The only way to improve your communication is to admit you don't understand. If you're struggling to comprehend a message, let the speaker know. As long as you're polite, there's no harm in saying you're confused.

For example, you might say:

- *"I'm not sure I understand."*
- *"I'm sorry, I didn't catch that."*
- *"I'm not clear about that second point."*

Step 2

Ask Clarifying Questions

Clarifying questions are used by active listeners to obtain more information. After explaining that you don't understand, follow up with a nonjudgmental question to remove ambiguity.

By asking a question, you'll guide the speaker in the right direction and allow them to elaborate. Try asking a speaker to repeat what they've said, offer more details, or give examples.

Here are a few common clarifying questions:

- *"Could you please repeat that?"*
- *"Would you mind taking me through that one more time?"*
- *"Before we move on, could you tell me more about ____?"*
- *"What did you mean when you said ____?"*
- *"Could you give me an example to make sure I understand?"*

Step 3

Say “Thank You” and Show You Understand

After a speaker clarifies their message, thank them for the extra details, information, or examples. Then, let the speaker know you understand so that they can move on. You might say:

- *“Thanks for clarifying. That makes more sense to me now.”*
- *“Thank you for repeating that. I understand it better now.”*

If you’re still confused, share your interpretation to check whether you’re right. That will allow the speaker to either confirm or correct your understanding. Here are some examples of how that might sound:

- *“Thank you! Just so I’m on the same page, am I correct that ____?”*
- *“Thanks for the extra details. My impression is that _____. Is that what you meant?”*
- *“Great, thank you. So, I will _____. Is that correct?”*

Summary

If you missed something a speaker said, don't hesitate to speak up.

You can seek clarification by following three steps: admit you don't understand, ask clarifying questions, and finally, say "*thank you*" and summarize your interpretation.

Clarifying Vague Directions

Your boss is giving you directions on a new project. Everything makes sense except for the last step. What should you do?

- ☐ I'll let my boss know that I'm confused and will ask for more information about the last step.
- ☐ I don't want my boss to think I wasn't listening, so I'll say "thank you" and figure out the rest along the way.

SUBMIT


Summary

Whether we misspeak or mishear, confusion is a normal part of communication.

If you've said the wrong thing, apologize to your listener, acknowledge the mistake, and avoid making excuses. Then, correct and clarify your message, and repeat it to make sure there's no confusion.

If you're confused about someone else's message, seek clarification. Admit you don't understand and ask clarifying questions. Then, once you think you understand, say *"thank you"* and summarize your interpretation. You want to confirm that you and the speaker are on the same page.

The next time you experience miscommunication, don't ignore the problem. Rectify your mistakes and ask for clarification. You'll become a more effective communicator as a result.

 **Stay calm.** If you make a communication mistake, stay calm. If you make a big deal out of the problem or appear agitated, you'll likely blow it out of proportion. Take a few deep breaths, calmly address the situation, and move on.

How to Remove Five Common Communication Barriers



Tamara Tupper

Introduction

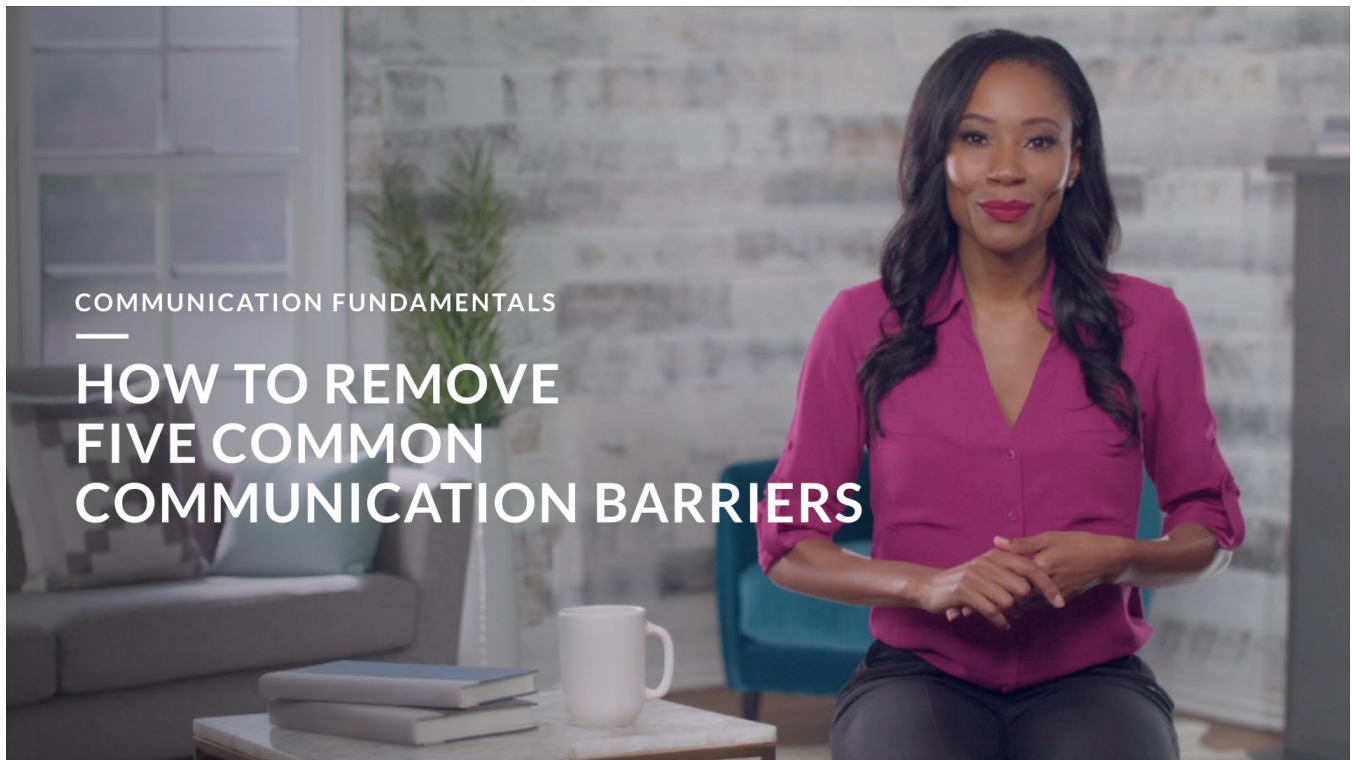
Imagine this scene: It's the end of the day. You're feeling overstressed and overtired, and rushing to finish that last assignment. A coworker approaches your desk about another (unrelated) project as you're typing away. "Next week ... we'll have to get with those other departments ... GHN is a big priority."

After he walks away, you realize you don't know what he said. What's happening? When is this happening? What departments? And *who* or *what* is GHN? You don't want to appear ignorant, but you have no idea what to do or say next.

That is an example of miscommunication in action, and it happens to all of us.

We receive or send a message that doesn't make sense because the information is unclear, the language is confusing, we're emotionally overwhelmed, or there's something else blocking our understanding—such as a background distraction or a difference in perspective.

When this happens—when our understandings don’t line up—there’s usually a communication barrier in the way, and it can lead to a lot of confusion. So, how do we remove these barriers? In this lesson, we’ll explore that answer, focusing on five of the most common communication barriers and explaining how to best avoid and overcome them as both senders and receivers of messages.



In this video, we describe five of the most common communication barriers and explain how to best avoid and remove them as senders and receivers.

5 Common Communication Barriers

What are some of the most common communication barriers that can lead to misunderstandings? Explore the list below to find out:



1

Informational. Providing too little or too much information can create a communication barrier. If we speak in vague terms or leave out essential details, our receivers might not have enough information to understand our messages correctly. If, on the other hand, we give too much information, our receivers may be unable to focus in on any key points or takeaways.

2

Language. When we use abbreviations, slang, technical jargon, or colloquialisms, we risk confusing our receivers. Not only does this often lead to a misinterpretation of our message, but it can also cause our receivers to avoid providing input because they don't want to appear unknowledgeable.

3

Emotional. When our emotions are heightened—such as when we are stressed, overtired, nervous, sad, or angry—effective communication can become difficult. As receivers, we may be more distracted and prone to selective listening. As senders, we may be unable to convey our thoughts clearly.

4

Physical. Background distractions such as noise, faulty equipment, distance, and even physical discomfort can all disrupt the flow of communication. For example, have you ever struggled to hear instructions shouted at you from a distance? Or, have you ever tried to pay attention to a long presentation in a stuffy meeting room with the temperature set at 80 degrees?

5

Perceptual. Because we all come from different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, we tend to have different perspectives. These unique viewpoints can cloud our understandings and cause us to interpret the same words and actions differently. For example, while giving a “thumbs up” gesture may be seen as a sign of approval for some, in other cultures that same action is perceived as rude and offensive.



Communication Barriers: Imagine the Impact

Communication barriers can cause a lot of confusion. Consider the examples below. How would you interpret these messages?

Too Much Information. You just received a proposal from a colleague in another department, but you've already read the first two pages and still aren't sure what it's about. Thus far, you've only read about a number of challenges facing the company. This is going somewhere, right?

Language Barriers: Abbreviations. *"TY. QQ right now over all the RAKs I've been seeing. So tonight, we're celebrating. WTPA?!"* While there may be plenty of people who understand the above statement, how might those who aren't fluent in texting lingo receive it?

Emotional Distractions. Right before you head into a company conference, you receive a private message from your boss: *"Later, we need to talk about your performance."* Understandably, you spend the entire meeting feeling anxious and nervous. How well do you think you understood everything your colleagues shared at today's conference?

How to Remove Five Common Communication Barriers

Whether you're the sender or the receiver, expand the below rows to learn how to avoid and overcome common communication barriers.

Give Clear, Concise Info —

When explaining something to others, eliminate the guesswork by being straightforward and providing specifics. Or, if you are the receiver and feeling confused, clearly ask the sender for more information by requesting details or examples.

Also, remember that part of being clear means being concise. Avoid long-winded sentences, stay on target, and keep your points focused and brief. If you're the receiver and the message is too jumbled, try giving a concise prompt to the sender: *"What's the end goal?"*

Use Simple Language —

Your message is less likely to be misinterpreted if you use everyday language that everyone understands. You should avoid abbreviations, slang, jargon, or colloquialisms. Instead, choose short, easy words and simplify your language as much as possible. Or, if you're the receiver and don't understand the language, try restating what the sender said in simpler terms to make sure you're on the same page.

Have Emotional Awareness —

While we can't always control our feelings, we can be more aware of them. If your emotions are heightened, try stepping away and asking to return to the situation when you're more stable. Equally, if you recognize that someone else is emotionally charged, try to be sensitive and not force the communication.

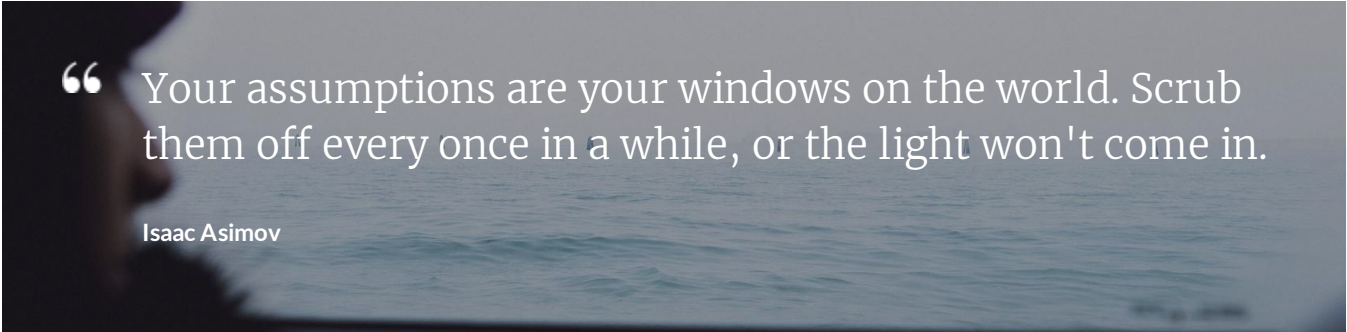
Have Physical Awareness —

If you're struggling to understand another person (or are being misunderstood yourself), see if you can spot any physical barriers. Are you having trouble hearing this person because the cell service is bad? Try calling the person back later. Are you in a meeting where everyone is fidgeting

because they've been sitting for three hours straight? Maybe it's time to take a break. Physical communication problems can usually be fixed with just a little effort.

Keep an Open Mind —

When you or someone else is sharing information, do your best to remember that you may have different perspectives. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, try to see things from their viewpoint, and keep an open mind. You'll then be less likely to offend someone accidentally or jump to the wrong conclusions about what they did or said.



“ Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.

Isaac Asimov

What's Your Approach to This Communication Barrier?

Right before leaving the office, your manager says: “I need you to step it up,” but she provides no further information. You don't know how to interpret this vague message. What can you do?

- ☐ I'll start coming to work earlier and leaving later to show my dedication.
- ☐ I'll ask my manager for more information with questions like: "Can you give me a few more details?" and "Do you have an example of where I've fallen short?"
- ☐ I'll seek advice from my coworkers to see what they think.

SUBMIT

Summary

Whether you're the sender or the receiver of a message, there are steps you can take to limit miscommunication.

Start by thinking about the five most common communication barriers, and ask yourself: "*Could any of these problems be getting in the way?*" If so, you can more easily avoid and overcome these barriers by checking in with the following questions:

- **Informational:** Is all the information clear, straightforward, and on target? If not, can I clarify anything?

- **Language:** Is the word choice simple and easy to understand? Does anything need to be restated?
- **Emotional:** Are emotions heightened? Is now the best time to communicate?
- **Physical:** Are there any physical barriers or distractions in the way?
- **Perceptual:** Am I considering the other person's perspective and keeping an open mind?



Just enough information. What's the happy medium between too much and too little information? Try this: If you could put your entire message into only one sentence, what would you say? Now, give more details, but make sure you're staying on target. Remember, all extra information should still relate back to that original sentence.

Working With Different Communication Styles



Tamara Tupper

Are We Speaking the Same Language?

Your coworker asks for your design help on a project. After she gives you an overview of the project, you press for more details.

What's the timeline? Where will this design live? And what should it communicate? Your coworker doesn't seem too concerned with the details. She can tell you everything you want to know about the project goals—but that's about it. After much back and forth, you both leave the meeting feeling exasperated.

So, what went wrong? The problem might be a difference in communication styles.

A communication style is the way in which people process information and share it with others.

Problems can occur when you're working with someone who has a different communication style from your own. Operating with different communication styles can feel like speaking different languages—and messages can get lost in translation.

In this lesson, you'll learn four communication styles and how to identify each. By identifying the style in which you and others communicate, you can learn to adapt your communication style to work with others more effectively.



In this video, you'll learn how to adapt and work effectively with four different communication styles.

4 Styles of Communication

No communication style is inherently better or worse than another. They're simply different ways of receiving and sending information. Your personality, background, skill set, and values shape your communication style.

Let's start by examining the four communication styles below. As you review each style, try identifying which style is most dominant for you.

Action-Based —

People with an action-based communication style center their communications on action steps and how to produce results.

Action-based communicators are often directors, go-getters, and natural leaders. Their communication style is direct, task-oriented, and cuts to the chase. They don't hesitate to assign roles or delegate tasks to get the job done. They may appear assertive, decisive, and goal-oriented. Managers often employ an action-based communication style.

Common phrases of this communication style include:

- "I need you to ..."
- "Here's our plan."
- "The deadline is ..."
- "What's our implementation strategy?"
- "Let's talk about next steps."

Fact-Based —

A fact-based communication style values details, facts, and logic.

People with this communication style take a pragmatic, systematic, or scientific approach to interpreting and sharing information. They often appear serious or cautious in their work, and they might ask a lot of questions or evaluate information critically in their quest for accuracy.

It's not uncommon for engineers, data scientists, and researchers to exhibit this communication style.

Common phrases of this communication style include:

- "What does the data say?"
- "How did you reach that conclusion?"
- "We'll conduct an A/B test to identify which works best."

- “Let’s review the strengths and weaknesses of each.”

Idea-Based —

This communication style likes to focus on ideas, vision, and the high-level or “big picture” items. They often prefer brainstorming, connecting, and developing ideas rather than talking about how to execute them.

Idea-based communicators are often seen as innovators, entrepreneurs, or dreamers.

Common phrases of this communication style include:

- “I’ve developed an overview/outline of ...”
- “The big picture is ...”
- “Here’s the vision.”
- “Imagine ...”

People-Based —

The last communication style is people-based or relational. This style focuses on relationships, supporting people, and understanding what others think or feel.

People-based communicators are social, personable, and people-oriented. They take a collaborative approach to their work and like to discuss ideas or talk through issues together.

People-based communicators seek harmony, connection, and strong team relationships. Community managers and customer specialists are two examples of typical careers that might require a people-based communication style.

Common phrases of this communication style:

- “How do you feel about ...”
- “I really appreciate your ...”
- “I’d love to get your thoughts on ...”

- “From a customer’s perspective ...”

Not Everyone Has a Single Communication Style

It’s important to realize that most people don’t have a single communication style. Rather, many of us naturally lean on one to two dominant styles. We might combine or change styles in different situations. Communication styles are fluid, rather than set. That means you can learn to adapt your communication based on your listener or what the situation demands.



How to Adapt Your Communication Style to the Other Party

Try to Adapt

Use the four communication styles to identify your own communication style as well as the communication style of your audience—whether that’s a client, coworker, or boss.

Once you understand the communication style of your listener, you can then adapt your communication style to suit. Adapting to other people's communication styles doesn't mean that you're changing the content of your message. Rather, it involves delivering the content in a way that others will receive and process it.

Click on the following tabs to learn practical tips for adapting to each communication style.

Action-Based —

If you're working with someone who prefers an action-based communication style, then make your communications succinct, task-based, and action-oriented. Skip any unnecessary details or small talk and get to the bottom line. Approach communications from the perspective of the practical steps of who, what, when, where, and how to achieve set objectives.

- **Do:** Communicate action items and how they will produce results. Speak with confidence.
- **Don't:** Take blunt feedback personally or waffle on decisions.

Fact-Based —

For this communication style, shift your information to focus on the facts. Present information in an orderly, logical way that clearly outlines supporting research or data. Analyze ideas critically and from all angles. You also might need to build in extra time for people with this communication style to reflect, gather their thoughts, or develop a plan. They may prefer to work on a problem independently.

- **Do:** Provide concrete examples, evidence, and explanations. Prepare for debate or questions. Use charts, figures, and graphs. Give clear expectations. Be realistic, rational, and precise.
- **Don't:** Be offended if this person tries to find holes in your logic. Don't ask for an opinion or recommendation without giving them time to research. Don't be idealistic or emotional.

Idea-Based —

Focus your communications on the vision, mission, overall picture, or big ideas. Communicate information through summaries, outlines, high-level overviews, and share how tasks fit into the greater objectives of the team or company. Motivate someone with an idea-based communication style by focusing on the big idea and letting them run with it from there.

- **Do:** Spend more time discussing what and why. Involve this person in brainstorming and developing ideas. Be creative.
- **Don't:** Weigh down communications with the small details; a simple outline or summary is ideal. Don't hesitate to dream big and think out-of-the-box.

People-Based —

If you're working with someone who prefers a people-based communication style, then mirror their warm, friendly, and personal approach to working with people. Plan plenty of meetings to collaborate and discuss ideas, feelings, and opinions with relevant members of the team. Frame projects by their impact on people.

- **Do:** Set up meetings to share progress, work together, or discuss ideas. Check in often to see how this person is feeling and learn how to better support one another. Be casual and emotionally honest in conversations.
- **Don't:** Be too blunt, curt, or aggressive. Don't confine their ability to express themselves. Don't be too formal or underestimate the power of team-building, relationships, and personal connection.

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this communication as a guide to our communication with others.”

Tony Robbins

Sorting Exercise

Do you understand the differences between all four communication styles? What about how to adapt to each? Try this sorting activity to check your understanding. Drag-and-drop each example into the correct communication style.

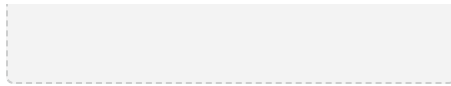
Action-Based

Break down a project into tasks.

Summarize meeting action items.

Give clear timelines.

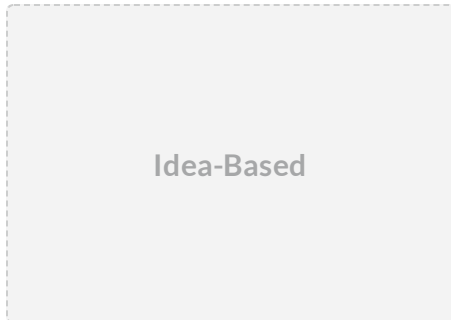
Fact-Based



Prepare graphs for your meeting.

Give space to work independently.

Provide as many details as you can up front.



Idea-Based

Focus on the big picture.

Give an overview of project goals.

Create a vision board.

People-Based

Ask about their weekend.

Share a customer impact story.

Schedule check-in meetings.

Knowledge Check

Next, answer the following knowledge check to practice how to apply different communication styles in real-world scenarios.

What do you do? You asked a colleague to provide you with website copy by Friday. Deadlines have shifted, and you now need to move the

deadline up to Thursday. Considering your colleague's action-based communication style, how do you make that request?


- ☐ “The client has moved deadlines forward to coincide with a product launch. I’ll need that website copy by EOD Thursday.”
- ☐ “When is the earliest I could get that website copy from you? You can get back to me after you have a chance to review the project and assess the time commitment.”
- ☐ “My deadlines have shifted, and it’d be a huge help to get that website copy from you by Thursday instead. Do you feel that’s realistic with your current workload?”
- ☐ “I’m going to need that website copy by Thursday instead of Friday now. They’re launching the new product on Thursday as well. The updated copy will allow us to share our story and make a stronger connection with all of the new traffic that will be visiting our site!”

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Summary

Different people process information in different ways. We can work with others more effectively by understanding one another's dominant communication styles. Start by identifying whether your audience uses a dominant action-based, fact-based, idea-based, or people-based communication style. Then, adapt your communication style to match theirs.

- **Action-based.** If they are action-based, then make your communication task-oriented and focus on execution and producing results.
- **Fact-based.** If they are fact-based, then present information systematically, focus on the facts, and don't leave out any details.
- **Idea-based.** If they are idea-based, you'll need to communicate the big picture or greater vision.
- **People-based.** And if they're people-based, then use emotional language and give them a chance to discuss ideas with others and build interpersonal connections.

 **Ask what they prefer.** If you're unsure what communication style the other person prefers, just ask them directly. For example, you might ask, "What's your preferred communication style?" Or, "Is there anything I could change or do differently to communicate more effectively?" They'll appreciate the effort, and you won't have to guess what works best for them.

Becoming an Expert Verbal Communicator



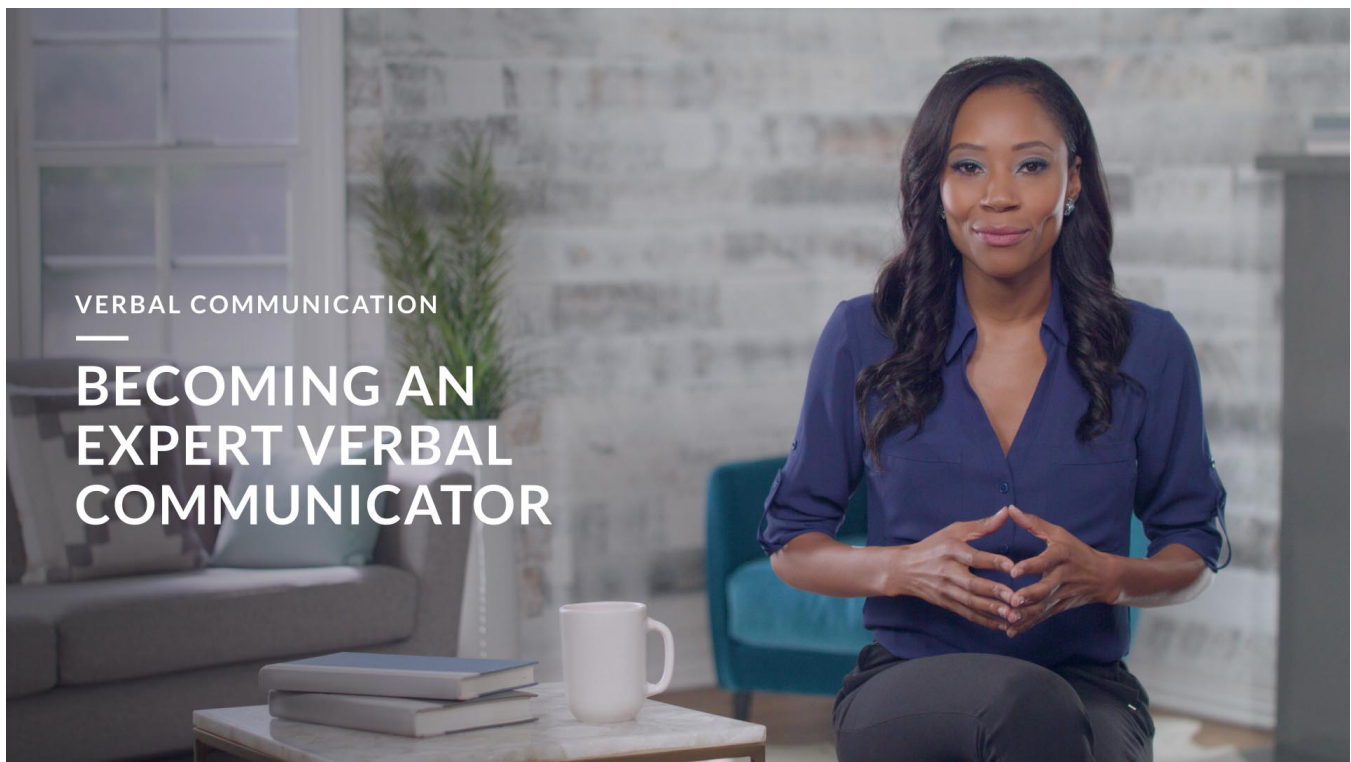
Tamara Tupper

Introduction

Excellent communication skills are a core component of business success. When we communicate well, we share our ideas more competently, understand others more clearly, and build rewarding relationships.

But how do we create lively conversations? How do we take our communication skills from good to great?

In this lesson, you'll learn how to become an expert communicator and leave a lasting, positive impression. First, we'll list the foundations of excellent communication and explain how to sustain a great conversation. Then, we'll unpack why it's important to focus on your communication partner.



This video lists the foundations of excellent communication and explains how to sustain a great conversation that focuses on your communication partner.

4 Foundations of Excellent Communication

Whether you're speaking or listening, you can communicate more effectively by remembering the four foundations of excellent communication.

1

Be in the moment. Your verbal communication skills depend on your ability to focus. That means not multitasking or getting distracted by the things or people around you. Don't let your mind wander. Don't be half in or half out of a conversation. Be in the moment, and your communication will flow more smoothly.

2

Keep an open mind. It's difficult to speak or listen to someone who refuses to be flexible. We all have different outlooks, opinions, and viewpoints. Enter every

communication with an open mind and cooperative attitude. You'll have better conversations as a result.

3

Be positive. Whenever possible, try maintaining a positive attitude. Avoid complaining or making excuses. Even if the topic is negative, think of ways you can optimistically spin your communication. Are you responding to a negative review? Explain how you'll do better going forward. Are you speaking to someone who's angry? Don't fuel the fire. Instead, suggest positive solutions.

4

Be mindful of nonverbal cues. If you're speaking, your facial expressions and body language should fit the message. If you're listening, show you're attentive by making eye contact, leaning forward, and nodding your head. Also, pay attention to the nonverbal cues of others. That will help you understand their message and respond appropriately.

How to Sustain a Conversation

Once your foundations are in place, the key to sustaining a great conversation is to follow a four-step approach. Click through these process cards to see how it's done.

Step 1

Ask Open Questions

When starting a conversation, ask open-ended questions. Unlike closed questions (which can be answered with a single word or short phrase), open questions invite a long response. These questions encourage your conversation partner to share in-depth answers and take the discussion in multiple directions.

When asking your question, show interest in the other person by complimenting them, finding common ground, or asking for advice:

- *“I really enjoyed your latest blog post. What gave you the idea?”*
- *“I hear we’re from the same hometown. What inspired you to move out here?”*
- *“What a great event! How do you know the host?”*
- *“Do you recommend any restaurants in this area?”*

Step 2

Practice Active Listening

After asking a question, pay attention to the other person's answer by practicing active listening. It takes concentration and effort to be a great listener. When you listen actively, others will feel heard, understood, and cared about. It requires that you:

1. Keep an open mind
2. Focus on the other person
3. Don't plan your response while they're talking
4. Don't interrupt or finish the other person's sentences

Give your companion your full attention, and they'll feel better about themselves and the information they're sharing.

Step 3

Dig Deeper with Follow-Up Questions

Usually, people will volunteer extra information during a conversation. Based on what they've shared, can you ask any follow-up questions?

Maybe you asked this person about their favorite restaurants, and they mentioned being a vegetarian. Dig deeper by asking another open-ended question: *"That's interesting! What drove you to become a vegetarian?"*

Listen for clues. Explain that you'd like to know more. When you dig deeper with follow-up questions, you expand on the details to keep the conversation moving.

Step 4

Respond with Specific and Brief Information

It's also important to contribute to the conversation by chiming in with relevant information. Can you relate to anything this person has said? If so, share a story or comment.

When forming your response, give specifics. A descriptive comment will paint a colorful picture. Instead of, "I need that report later," you'd say, "I need the report on work production by the end of today." When you're specific, your message is less likely to be misunderstood.

Also, show your conversation partner that you respect their time and value their input by keeping your comments brief. When you make an effort to share your message succinctly, you won't monopolize the conversation.

Summary

So, to sustain a great conversation, remember to follow four steps.

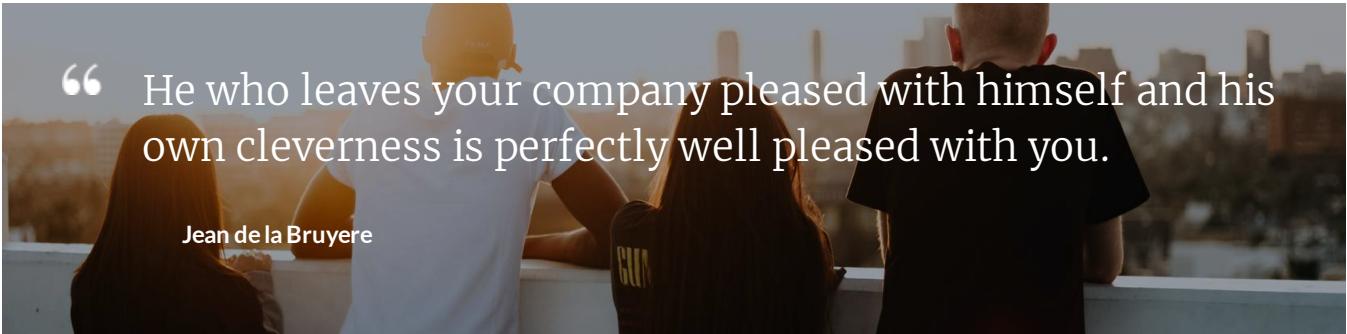
First, **ask open questions** and **practice active listening**. Then, to keep the dialogue moving, dig deeper with **follow-up questions** and **respond with specific and brief information** of your own.

Make It About the Other Person

Communication is about connection. To be effective, you'll need to show interest in the other person and consider their needs and opinions.

If you're speaking, that means being respectful and tailoring your message to your listeners. Don't use words they're not familiar with. Don't talk endlessly about something they have no interest in. Ask yourself: *"What do they care about?"* or, *"How will my communication benefit them?"* You want your companion to enjoy the discussion.

Draw the other person out. Show you care by asking follow-up questions and practicing active listening. Focus on your conversation partner and give them the spotlight. Even if you're delivering a presentation, save time for questions and listen closely. Expert communicators don't speak to hear themselves talk, and they don't listen for the sake of waiting for their turn. They make it about the other person.



“ He who leaves your company pleased with himself and his own cleverness is perfectly well pleased with you.

Jean de la Bruyere

What Will You Say?

You work for a computer company and receive a call from an agitated customer. They're yelling: "*It's not working!*" But they're giving no further details. How could you respond?

- ☐ Because this person is upset, there's nothing I can do. They need to calm themselves down before we can have a coherent conversation.
- ☐ I'll give this customer my undivided attention and remain positive. To better understand the complaint, I'll ask follow-up questions and practice active listening. Then, I'll offer a solution that's brief and specific.
- ☐ I'll be up-front with this person and help them see things from my perspective. I'll tell them that if they want me to help, they'll need to calm down and not take their anger out on me.

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Summary

Great communicators stay in the moment. They have an open mind, maintain a positive attitude, and are aware of nonverbal cues. When having a conversation, they keep the dialogue engaging by following the four-step process below:

1. Ask open questions
2. Practice active listening
3. Dig deeper with follow-up questions
4. Respond with specific and brief information

As an expert verbal communicator, you need to focus on the other person. When speaking, that means finding ways to relate to your audience. When listening, that means showing sincere interest. Keep these communication tools in mind, and you'll become an expert speaker, listener, and all-around verbal communicator.



Keep practicing. No one becomes an expert communicator overnight. It takes practice. Push yourself out of your comfort zone, strike up conversations, and apply these techniques. The more opportunities you have to communicate, the more natural these skills will become.