UNIT 1

Communication

'When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.'
Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), American writer

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STARTING UP

A **Think of a good communicator you know. Explain why he/she is good at communicating.**

B **What makes a good communicator? Choose the three most important factors from this list.**

- fluency in the language
- grammatical accuracy
- an awareness of body language
- an extensive vocabulary
- being a good listener
- not being afraid of making mistakes
- a sense of humour
- physical appearance
- no strong accent

C **What other factors are important for communication?**

D **Discuss these questions.**

1 What forms of written and spoken communication do you like using? Why?

2 What problems can people have with the different forms of communication?

3 How do you think those problems can be solved?

VOCABULARY
Good communicators

A **Which of these words apply to good communicators and which apply to bad communicators? Add two adjectives of your own to the list.**

articulate	coherent	eloquent	extrovert	fluent
focused	hesitant	inhibited	persuasive	rambling
reserved	responsive	sensitive	succinct	vague

B **Which of the words in Exercise A have these meanings?**

1 concise
2 reluctant to speak
3 talking in a confused way
4 able to express ideas well
5 clear and easy to understand
6 good at influencing people
7 outgoing
8 eager to react and communicate

C **Complete the extract below from a talk by a communication expert with the verbs from the box.**

clarify	confuse	digress	engage	explain	interrupt	~~listen~~	ramble

'Good communicators really ..listen..[1] to people and take in what is said. They maintain eye contact and have a relaxed body language, but they seldom .....[2] and stop people talking. If they don't understand and want to .....[3] something, they wait for a suitable opportunity.

When speaking, effective communicators are good at giving information. They do not .....[4] their listener. They make their points clearly. They will avoid technical terms, abbreviations or jargon. If they do need to use unfamiliar terminology, they .....[5] by giving an easy-to-understand example. Furthermore, although they may .....[6] in order to elaborate a point and give additional information and details where appropriate, they will not .....[7] and lose sight of their main message. Really effective communicators who have the ability to .....[8] with colleagues, employees, customers and suppliers are a valuable asset for any business.'

D CD1.1 **Listen to the talk and check your answers.**

*See the **DVD-ROM** for the i-Glossary.*

E **Think of a poor or bad communicator you know. How could they improve their skills? What advice would you give them?**

LISTENING
Improving communications

A CD1.2 **Listen to the first part of an interview with Alastair Dryburgh, an expert on communication. Does he think technology makes good communication easier?**

B CD1.2 **Listen again. What four key points does Alastair make about communication?**

Alastair Dryburgh

C CD1.3 **Listen to the second part of the interview. Alastair gives an example of a company which has used technology to change the way it communicates with customers. Give reasons why it communicates well.**

D CD1.4 **Listen to the final part, where Alastair is describing a bad customer experience. What mistakes did the company make, and how could they have improved the customer experience?**

*Watch the interview on the **DVD-ROM**.*

E **Discuss an example you know of a company which communicates well with its customers or a company which communicates badly. What advice would you give to the bad communicator?**

READING

E-mail: for and against

A **What irritates you most about these forms of communication?**

e-mail

mobile phone

conference calling

voicemail

BlackBerry

web presentation

B **What are the advantages and disadvantages of using e-mail?**

C **Read the article on the opposite page quickly and choose the best title.**

1 Time to switch your BlackBerry off

2 How to deal with your inbox

3 A quiet word beats sending e-mail

D **Read the article again and list the advantages and disadvantages of using e-mail. Does the writer mention any that you listed in Exercise B?**

E **Find expressions in the article which mean the following.**

1 looking at another person (paragraph 2)

2 upsetting or embarrassing someone by being rude or tactless (paragraph 2)

3 not be caught or punished when you have done something wrong (paragraph 4)

4 pretend something is true in order to deceive people (paragraph 4)

5 keeping writing or talking to someone, even though you do not see them often (paragraph 8)

6 aiming an idea or product at someone (paragraph 8)

F **Complete this text with the expressions in Exercise E in the correct form.**

I don't have a problem with him .....[1] his family whilst he's posted overseas and sending e-mails in office time. That's not the main issue. However, if he thinks he can .....[2] sending such abusive e-mails to colleagues, he is sadly mistaken and he'll have to face the consequences of his actions later. He is clearly .....[3] about his colleagues and spreading nasty rumours. He'd be better off speaking to colleagues .....[4] if he has problems with them. He's slightly better when speaking with customers, but he needs to think about who he's speaking to when he's .....[5] our products to them. And he just doesn't know how to say no to people without .....[6].

G **Discuss these questions.**

1 'Business is best done face to face.' Do you agree?

2 How could communication be improved in your organisation?

3 How will communication change in the office of the future?

4 What do you do when you receive a nasty e-mail?

5 Is communication better these days with all the new technology?

FT

by Luke Johnson

E-mail might just be responsible for the productivity increases that economists tell us are the key to rising prosperity. But it could also be sending us all mad.

The truth is that business is generally best done face to face, and if that is impossible, then speaking via the phone. But too many of us now hide behind silent, typed communications. The trouble is that the recipient of an e-mail does not hear a tone of voice or see a facial expression; nor can the sender modify their message halfway through, sensing that it is causing offence. When you read an e-mail, you cannot tell the mood of the e-mailer.

A permanent written form is deadly if you are feeling impetuous and emotional. Too often I have made the mistake of sending an irritable response, which will have festered and angered the other end much more than a difficult telephone exchange. Spoken words fade, but e-mail is forever.

It is so much easier to be tough via e-mail, or to get away with weak excuses, or to make things up, or to say no. Almost invariably, it is more human and serious to have a real discussion rather than a bizarre online conversation. I know employees who have been fired for sending abusive e-mails, or who have faced severe legal consequences for writing something they should have just said verbally.

Everyone in business finds their inbox is almost swamped every day with spam. I notice I spend longer and longer sorting out the e-mails that matter from all the junk. It has become, I'm afraid, a dangerously corrupted medium. Large companies suffer chronic overuse of 'reply to all'.

Moreover, e-mail can be a terrible distraction, especially if you use a BlackBerry. I was recently reprimanded for peeking at mine during a board meeting – a gross form of hypocrisy on my part, because I once threatened to sling out of the window any PDA-type devices being used in meetings I chaired. I have now vowed to switch off both BlackBerry and mobile in all meetings – anything less is uncivil.

It must be admitted that e-mail is hard to beat as a transmitter of documents and data. It forces the sender to carefully think through their arguments and express themselves logically. It allows you to reply swiftly to a host of different questions when time is short. You don't have to worry about journey times or travel costs, unreliable postage or engaged phones or voicemail.

E-mail is a marvellously economical tool for keeping in touch with far-flung commercial contacts; you can send them a note at your leisure, 24 hours a day. It is also a terrific method of discreetly and directly pitching to someone powerful. It certainly beats trying to get a meeting or even reach them on the phone.

Like it or not, I could not do my job without e-mail. Meanwhile, I know a senior financier, an ex-chair of a FTSE company, who still has his secretary print out his e-mails for him to read so he can then dictate replies for her to e-mail back. Now that really is mad.

LANGUAGE REVIEW

Idioms

A **Complete the idioms below with the words from the box.**

bush	grapevine	loop	mouth	nutshell	picture
point	purposes	stick	tail	wall	wavelength

a) to put it in a .....
b) to get straight to the .....
c) to hear it on the .....
d) to put someone in the .....
e) to get the wrong end of the .....
f) to be on the same .....
g) can't make head nor ..... of it
h) to talk at cross-.....
i) to beat about the .....
j) to get it straight from the horse's .....
k) to be like talking to a brick .....
l) to keep someone in the .....

to keep someone in the loop

to be on the same wavelength

B **Match the idioms in Exercise A to these definitions.**

1 to fail to understand anything *9*
2 to share similar opinions and ideas
3 to give the main facts in a short, clear way
4 to not understand something
5 to delay talking about something
6 to give the latest information
7 to talk about the most important thing
8 to hear about something because the information has been passed from one person to another in conversation
9 to be told something by someone who has direct knowledge of it
10 to try to communicate with an unresponsive person
11 to include someone in group communication
12 to not understand someone

C **Complete these sentences with the idioms from Exercise A in the correct form.**

1 OK, I'll ..... I'm afraid it's the last time we're going to miss a deadline.
2 Paola and I and agree on most things. We seem to be .....
3 A lot happened while you were on holiday. Let me .....
4 I think we are ..... I mean next week, not this week.
5 He never gives you a straight answer. He's always .....
6 I ..... that he's been fired. Is it true?
7 The new organogram is very complicated, but to ....., we still report to the same manager.
8 I'm afraid that isn't right. If you think our biggest problem is communication, then you have .....
9 This document from our subsidiary makes no sense at all. I .....
10 I've tried to get my supplier to give us a discount several times, but they just won't. It's like .....
11 The company is going bankrupt. The CEO told me himself. I heard it .....
12 I'll need regular updates about the progress of the project. I'll also need to know what's going on when I'm away. Please .....

D **Ask your partner these questions.**

1 What have you heard on the grapevine recently?
2 When is it necessary to put someone in the picture?
3 In what situations is it good to get straight to the point?
4 Is there anything you can't make head nor tail of?
5 Who are you on the same wavelength as? Why?
6 Have you ever felt you were talking to a brick wall?
7 When have you been kept either in or out of the loop? How did you feel?

SKILLS

Dealing with communication breakdown

A **What expressions can you use in these phone situations?**

a) the person speaks too fast or too quietly

b) you want someone to stop talking while you do something

c) you don't understand a word/expression the other person uses

d) you want to make sure of the spelling of something

e) you want more information about a subject

f) the connection is not good and you can't continue the conversation

g) you want to confirm some information

B CD1.5 **Listen to a telephone conversation between Bernard Klebermann and Koichi Sato. Which of the problems mentioned in Exercise A do the speakers have when communicating?**

C CD1.6 **Listen to the same two speakers in a similar conversation. Explain why the second conversation is better. Give as many reasons as you can.**

D CD1.6 **Listen to the conversation again and complete these extracts with words or expressions from it.**

1 That's good. Could you .... while I get a pen?

2 Sorry, Bernard, I .... Could you .... a little, please? I need to take some notes.

3 Let me ..... that: 200 posters, pens and pencils and 50 bags. ..... it.

4 Seel- ... sorry, could you .... me, please, Bernard? I don't think I know the company.

5 'They've placed an order for 518 of the new lasers ...'
'Sorry, ... 580 lasers?'

6 Sorry, I don't follow you. What ..... 'roll-out' ..... ?

7 But I need details about the company ... Sorry, it's ....
Could you .... , please? I can't hear you very well.

8 Sorry, I still can't hear you. I'll ...., maybe the line will be better.

E **Match each extract in Exercise D to the situations you discussed in Exercise A. Two of them correspond to the same situation.**

F **Work in pairs. Role-play two situations.**

Student A: Turn to page 132. Student B: Turn to page 140.

USEFUL LANGUAGE

ASKING FOR REPETITION

Sorry, could you repeat that?

I didn't (quite) catch that.

Could you speak up, please?

Could you say that again, please?

ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

What do you mean by ...?

What does ... mean?

Could you clarify that?

CHECKING INFORMATION

Would/Could you spell that, please?

Can I read that back to you?

PROBLEMS WITH UNDERSTANDING

Sorry, I'm not with you.

Sorry, I don't follow you.

Sorry, I'm not sure I know what you mean.

ASKING FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Could you give me some more details, please?

Could you be a bit more specific?

Could you explain that in more detail?

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

Sorry, it's a bad line. Can I call you back?

It's a terrible connection.

I'm afraid I'll have to get back to you later.

Sorry, we were cut off.

SUMMARISING THE CALL

Let me go over what we've agreed.

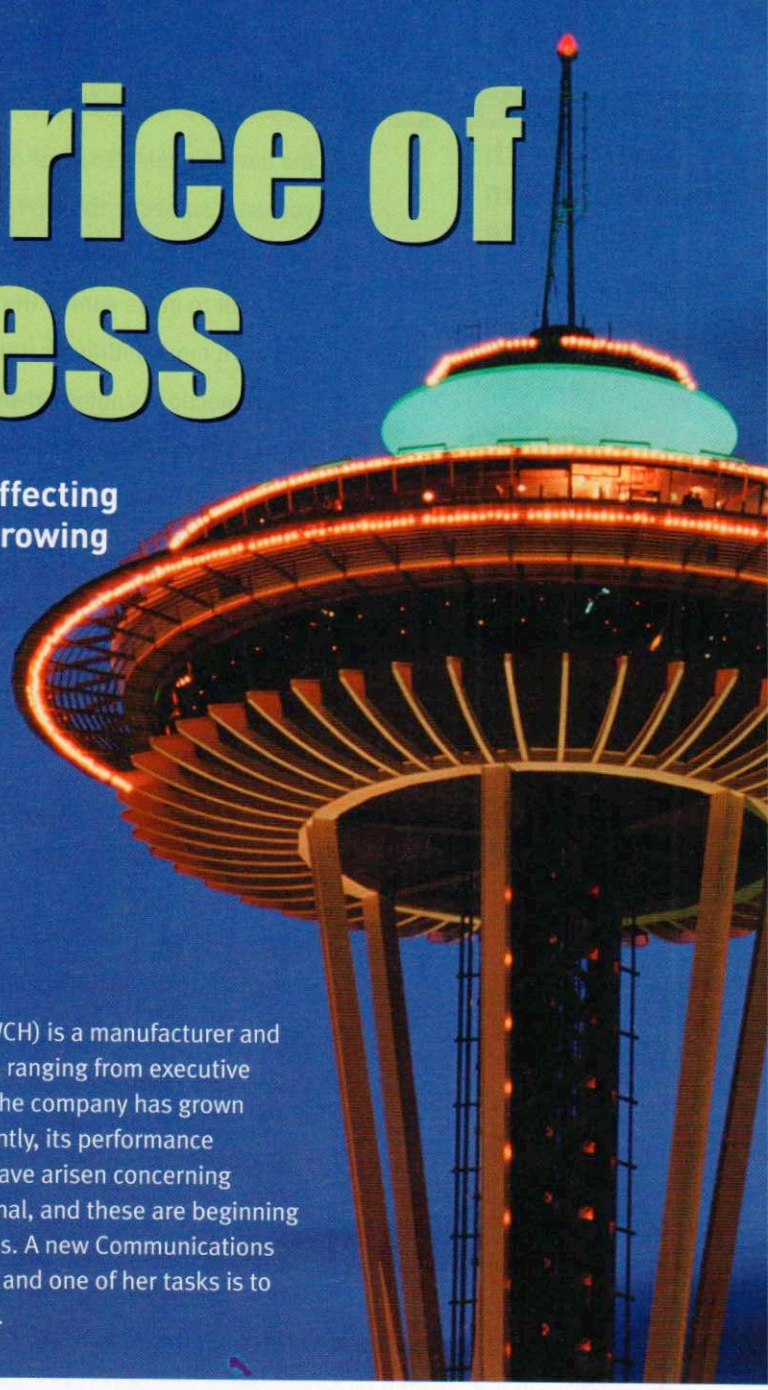
Let me just summarise ...

1

Case study

The price of success

Poor communications are affecting the performance of a fast-growing electronics company



Background

Based in Seattle, US, W.C. Hooper Inc. (WCH) is a manufacturer and distributor of hi-tech electronic products, ranging from executive toys to state-of-the-art digital cameras. The company has grown rapidly in the last 20 years and until recently, its performance has been excellent. However, problems have arisen concerning communications, both internal and external, and these are beginning to impact on the efficiency of the business. A new Communications Director, Betty Friedman, has been hired, and one of her tasks is to improve communications in the company.

A product defect

A weakness in the company's communications was highlighted by the following incident. What mistakes do you think were made in the way this problem was handled? How could they be remedied?

About three months ago, a customer found a fault in WCH's most up-to-date, multi-functional cell phone. Her phone became very hot after being recharged and it burned her hand. 'It was so hot, I thought it would explode,' she said. The customer complained to the Customer Service Department, who sent her a replacement phone. The employee dealing with the complaint did not inform either the Marketing or R&D Departments about the fault. After this incident, there were a number of similar complaints. As a result of bad publicity, the phone was withdrawn from the market.

Lawrence Discount Stores

Another incident a few weeks ago showed that internal communications in the company were not working well. Read about the problem and discuss the reason(s) why WCH lost an important customer.

Richard Lawrence, one of WCH's best and oldest customers, phoned William Hooper about the company's new digital camera, the EX-120. He told Hooper that he'd probably be placing an order for 5,000 of the products in the next few weeks. Hooper passed on this information by phone to the Sales Manager. When Lawrence sent in the order five weeks later, the Sales Manager sent him an e-mail saying that unfortunately the new product was out of stock. Lawrence complained to Hooper, who asked the Sales Manager why he hadn't given priority to Lawrence's order. The manager replied, 'I was waiting for him to confirm his order. I didn't realise that his order had to be given priority.'

The new Communications Director

Betty Friedman, the new Communications Director, hired a firm of consultants, Ward Associates, to analyse the communications problems in the company and to come up with recommendations for improvement. Read this extract from the report.

1 Internal communications

Problem:
Communications between Directors and Heads of Department need to be improved.

Recommendations:
- Heads of Department should send weekly reports to the Board of Directors. This would enable Directors to keep in touch with key developments in the company.
- A new manager should be appointed to be in charge of key accounts, such as the Lawrence Discount Stores account. He/She would ensure that key customers were given personal attention.

2 Sales reps/Head Office

Problem:
Head Office is not receiving information quickly from sales representatives. This has resulted in delays in processing orders and insufficient information about customers.

Recommendation:
Issue all sales reps with BlackBerry devices and instruct reps to send daily reports to the Sales Department.

3 Customer Services Department

Problem:
The department needs a new procedure for dealing with product complaints.

Recommendation:
Any complaint about a product which has health and safety implications should be forwarded immediately to the following departments: Marketing, Research and Development, Public Relations.

CD1.7 William Hooper is talking to Betty Friedman. Listen to his reaction to the consultants' recommendations and summarise his attitude to weekly reports, appointing a new account manager, and defective products.

CD1.8 Listen to Joanna Merkowitz, a sales representative, talking to Betty Friedman about the consultants' recommendations. Why is she against giving daily reports? Why does she enjoy her job so much?

Task

1. Work in small groups. You are members of the Board of Directors. Discuss each of the consultants' recommendations. Decide whether you agree or disagree with each recommendation, noting down your reasons.
2. Consider any other ideas that your group has to improve communications in WCH.

Watch the Case study commentary on the ***DVD-ROM.***

Writing

As Communications Director at WCH, write a follow-up e-mail to the Head of Ward Associates, summarising the decisions you have taken, with your reasons.

Writing file page 127