

Does your Communication Style Make or Break You?

Every day we make choices about how we communicate, what we're going to say and who we're going to communicate with. Have you ever thought about how you make these choices? Do you put serious thought into the results these choices have on you, your listener, and the impact of your message?

Most of us fall into one of the following categories when we're presenting, facilitating a meeting, having a face-to-face conversation, or talking over the telephone.

Rambler

- They have difficulty getting to the point.
- Their mind wanders off into right or left field and they wonder how they got there.
- At times they have no idea they're rambling.
- They focus on themselves and not their listeners.
- They rarely change their message on the spot to meet their listener's needs.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They're confused and can't follow your message.
- They lose interest and drift away from you and the message.

Filler Fanatic (uh, um, and so, but, etc.)

- Most of the time they're not aware they're using non-words.
- They have a fear of silence if they replace their filler words with a pause.
- They fear if they pause their listener will think "they don't know what they're saying" and/or their listener will interrupt.
- They speak fast with run-on sentences because their non-words form bridges from one sentence to another.
- Because they're talking fast, they will focus on themselves rather than their listener.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They're distracted by your non-words.
- They count your non-words.
- They miss your message, will not create a relationship with you, and therefore will not be influenced to take the action you recommend.

Fast Talker

- They hold their breath when they speak.
- When they finally take time to breathe, it sounds like they're gasping for air.
- They can communicate double the information of a non-fast talker.
- They begin to sound like they're having a conversation with themselves.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They miss your message.
- They stop listening because your rate of speech makes it too difficult to pay attention and listen.
- They fear you're going to pass out due to a lack of air.

Lifeless

- They speak in a monotone voice.
- They're emotionless with no facial expressions.
- They frequently look away from their listener when they're communicating. Instead they talk to the floor, the back of the room, their laptop, notes, etc.
- They don't involve their listeners.

What's the impact on listeners?

- It's difficult to hear you speak.
- It's difficult to understand.
- They perceive you as boring and they're bored.
- They question your belief and passion for your message, which damages their trust in you.

PowerPoint Lover

- They don't have confidence to deliver a message without their PowerPoint.
- Every key point or idea is communicated following a click on their laptop to the next slide.
- They have become emotionally close to their PowerPoint and continuously talk to it and have a relationship with it.
- They read every slide to their listener.
- Their handouts are identical to their PowerPoint slides.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They're annoyed because you're reading to them.
- They wonder if they should leave you and your PowerPoint slides alone since you're having such a great relationship.
- They miss the details of your message because they can't listen to you and read the PowerPoint slide at the same time.

Podium Hugger

- They hang onto the podium for dear life and look like they're ready to take off.
- They talk to their podium as if nobody is sitting or standing in front of them.
- They get cramps in their hands because they're hanging on so tight to the podium.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They lose interest, become disengaged and drift from your message.
- They aren't as willing to create a relationship with you because the podium is a barrier between you and them.

Laser Pointer Magician

- They never put the laser pointer down.
- They try to highlight key points and ideas on their PowerPoint slides while fighting their nervous, shaking hand.
- The laser light jumps everywhere: on the screen and in the listeners' eyes.
- They create a laser show because they forgot to shut the laser pointer off and now are blinding everyone.

What's the impact on listeners?

- They become nauseated by the motion of the laser pointer.
- They're confused by what they should be looking at.
- They fear they're going to get shot in the eye with the bright beam of light.
- Because of the shaking laser, they begin guessing what you want them to look at.

No matter which category you fall into there are a number of risks.

- You will not connect with your listeners, engage them nor keep their attention.
- It will be very difficult to convey your message in a way that influences action.
- You will lose credibility and trust.
- Your message is not heard or the wrong message will be conveyed.
- You waste your time and your listener's time.

Not only do we make choices about how we communicate, we also make the choice to change. If you fall into the category of a rambler; this doesn't mean once a rambler always a rambler. The first element to changing your communication behavior is awareness. You can't change something unless you know it exists. If you see yourself slipping into one of these categories, what can you do?

Rambler, Filler Fanatic or Fast Talker

- Pause and breathe in between your sentences, thoughts, key points and ideas.
- Speak in shorter sentences.
- Take time to interact with your listeners.
- Ask friends, family, and co-workers to give you feedback when you fall into one of these categories.
- Begin practicing; less is more!

Lifeless

- Believe 100% that your message is important for your listeners to hear.
- Pay attention to what your facial expressions and tone communicate during your day-to-day conversations.
- Place a small mirror at your desk to identify what your facial expressions communicate during various telephone conversations.
- Ask friends, family, and co-workers to give you feedback when you speak in a monotone voice or when you have no facial expressions.

PowerPoint Lover

- Avoid using your PowerPoint slides as your notes.
- Practice delivering your message without PowerPoint. Once you're confident with your message, then incorporate PowerPoint.
- For every slide ask yourself: "What is the one I take away?" "Why am I using this slide?" "What do I want my listeners to remember?"

Podium Hugger

- If you need a microphone, ask for a lavalier.
- Practice communicating without your notes.
- Stand off to the side of the podium to begin getting rid of the barrier you're creating between you and your listeners.

Laser Pointer Magician

- Allow your words, rather than a laser pointer, to describe the detail on your slides.
- Avoid creating slides that have too much information on them or that communicate more than one idea. Save the detail for handouts.
- When you have a detailed graph, create a build, building one idea at a time on the graph.

Communication is a process that takes practice and persistence. Make a choice today on the steps you'll take immediately to change your communication behavior and stick with it for one month. It takes at least a month of repetitive behavior to change a habit. You'll begin to observe your listeners positively responding to you and your message.

Stacey Hanke is the president of 1st Impression Consulting, Inc. Stacey is a speaker and author of several books including Yes You Can! Everything You Need From A To Z To Influence Others To Take Action. Her website is www.1stimpressionconsulting.com. Stacey can be reached at 312.955.0380 or stacey.hanke@1stimpressionconsulting.com.

Copyright 2008 1st Impression Consulting, Inc. All rights reserved. While you may copy this publication, its content may not be modified. You may, and are encouraged to, share the publication with others who may benefit from receiving it.