

Communication and Mentoring in the Trades

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NSCC EDITION

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Introduction

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WHY THIS BOOK?

The need for clear and concise communication cannot be understated. The same statement could be applied to the topic and practice of mentoring within the skilled trades. One could argue that one of the strongest foundations for a solid mentoring experience would include a communication strategy that takes into account varying degrees and pathways towards success.

Your success in your apprenticeship, as well as your career in the skilled trades, can in part be traced to how well you give and receive information and how well you treat those under your guidance and influence. Indeed, everything rises and falls with leadership, leadership is influence, and one of the best methods of influencing is to be clear in what you think and how you communicate.

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

Following the Industry Training Authority's outline for the *Plumbing, Steamfitting, and Sprinkler-Fitter trades* this book looks to address lines F in both level one and level 4 (level 3 with respect to Sprinkler-Fitter). There are sections for you to read, there are videos offered in most chapters, and there are quizzes embedded with the book. As with most books, this one is designed to be used both in the classroom as well as out in the field. Your resources should be available for your reference as experiences in the field do not follow you into the classroom, and vice versa.

WHEN SHOULD YOU APPLY THIS KNOWLEDGE?

The short answer is, today! The skills you learn here are skills that are very transferrable to different contexts. Whether that context is the mechanical room, the board room, or the family room. The great thing with this subject matter is that these principles are not unique to the skilled trades and that is why this subject matter is so powerful. The lessons you learn here will make you a better communicator, mentor, and leader. These qualities are skills that one can learn and reach a certain level of mastery. The exciting thing is that once you begin applying the skills of becoming a better communicator and mentor you will not only have a positive influence on others, you will have a positive influence within your trade and industry.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Verbal Communication Practices

Verbal Communication Practices

The **skilled trades** are an environment in which clear and concise communication is essential for everything associated in your projects. Whether that's the everyday toolbox or safety meetings to the larger project progress meetings. Clear communication can be a complicated process, but the good news is each one of us can learn to engage others more effectively.

WHY INVEST IN IMPROVING OUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

Since communication is a natural and common occurrence one may think that there is little to no reason for improving the way we interact with others. However, investing the time and effort into improving our communication skills will make a marked difference in at least four areas;

1. Reduce potential conflicts.
2. Reduce misunderstandings.
3. Improve engagement.
4. Improve productivity.

Further, the Industry Training Authority as well as the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum has identified communication skills as an essential skill for not only apprentices looking to pass their endorsement exams, it is also an essential skill for life.

"Plumbers require good oral communication skills to interact with colleagues, apprentices, supervisors, suppliers, inspectors, clients, and other tradespersons when co-ordinating work, resolving problems and ensuring safety." – Red Seal Essential Skills Outline, Plumber (2016).

TYPES OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

There are essentially two types of categories of verbal skills:

1. Interpersonal

2. Leadership

These **two main categories** can be divided into **four sub-categories**. These four categories constitute the building blocks of effective verbal communication.

Four Sub-categories

1. **Intrapersonal:** Intrapersonal communication is a communicator's internal use of language or thought. It can be useful to envision intrapersonal communication occurring in the mind of the individual in a model which contains a sender, receiver, and feedback loop.



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2. **Interpersonal:** Interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages: it is face-to-face communication. It is here where we see the proper application of using questions to seek clarity as well as the acting of switching. Switching can be broken down into two components. The first is referred to as conversational switching, where a speaker's attitude toward the topic is conveyed to the recipient. The second is referred to as situational switching where the speaker's attitude towards the audience is communicated.



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3. **Public:** Public communication happens when individuals and groups engage in dialogue in the public sphere in order to deliver a message to a specific audience. Public speaking events, newspaper editorials, and billboard advertisements are a few forms of public communication.



public communication

4. **Leadership** : leadership is defined as inspiring and encouraging an individual or a group by systematic and meaningful sharing of information. It is here where we find elements of persuasion and negotiation being used by the speaker. Another form can be described as group talk. Group talk sees the speaker exchanging words like 'we' or 'us' for the singular forms 'I', 'you'. Employing this kind of communication is designed to make the group effective by being more inclusive and focused on the group's actions rather than upon particular individuals.



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BARRIERS TO UNDERSTANDING

As with all communication, there are obstacles to ensuring that what the speaker intends to communicate is actually understood and then enacted. The following is a list of some common barriers in verbal communication.

1. Encoding – Decoding^[1]

In basic terms, humans communicate through a process of **encoding** and **decoding**. The encoder is the person who develops and sends the message. As represented in Figure 1.1 below, the encoder must determine how the message will be received by the audience and make adjustments, so the message is received the way they want it to be received.

Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. The encoder uses a 'medium' to send the message — a phone call, email, text message, face-to-face meeting, or another communication tool. The level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages may vary. The encoder should also take into account any 'noise' that might interfere with their messages, such as other messages, distractions, or influences.

The audience then 'decodes', or interprets, the message for themselves. **Decoding** is the process of

turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your apprentice: "I'm hungry. Do you want to go for lunch soon?" As your apprentice receives the message, they decode your communication and turn it back into thoughts to make meaning.

2. Semantic Confusion, Jargon, and Slang[2]

In the past when you have used language to make sense of your experiences and to take part in discussions, you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication could work for you and sometimes against you. Language allowed you to communicate, but it also allowed you to miscommunicate and misunderstand.

In an article titled "The Miscommunication Gap," Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business:

- Damaged relationships
- Loss of productivity
- Inefficiency and rework
- Conflict
- Missed opportunities
- Schedule slippage (delays, missed deadlines)
- Scope creep...or leap (gradual or sudden changes in an assignment that make it more complex and difficult than it was originally understood to be)
- Wasted resources
- Unclear or unmet requirements



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Six Barriers to Communication

1. **Cliché** – cultural references that often make no sense in other cultures. For example, "A cliché is something to avoid like the plague, for it is nothing but a tired old warhorse, and if the shoe were on the other foot you too would have an ax to grind."
2. **Jargon** – An occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education but instead focuses on the language people in a particular profession use to communicate with each other.
3. **Slang** – The use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect. It differs from

jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

4. **Euphemism** – Involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning.
5. **Doublespeak** – The deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning.
6. **Offensive Language** – Some language is offensive and has no place in the workplace. It may even be a violation of company policy.

Each of these six barriers to communication contributes to misunderstanding and miscommunication, intentionally or unintentionally. If you recognize one of them, you can address it right away.

STRATEGIES TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Preparation

When you have to communicate to others in the field or when you are tasked with going to the wholesaler, you must take some time to prepare what you are going to say. A simple starting place would be to think through what you are going to ask or say and then writing down some notes to help you if you can't remember the content of your message.

Choose Carefully

We have to remember to choose our words and sentences carefully. As we have already covered, there is a multitude of potential barriers to communication. Taking the time to prepare leads to the need to choose your words and phrases carefully so that the barriers can be minimized or neutralized altogether.

Clarity

The next step in improving your communication skills is to seek clarity. Both as the sender but more so as the receiver or listener. As the sender, it would be important to stop and ask the one who is listening if they have any questions or concerns about what you just said. As the listener, it is even more important to ask questions of the sender if there is any hint of doubt in your mind regarding what was just communicated.

Tone

Often the tone in our voice will communicate deeper meaning to what we are saying. Being aware of your emotions in the moment of communicating will help to minimize any interference that your tone may indicate. For example, one may begin to raise their voice as they talk about a specific method of performing a trade task. The receiver may interpret this as anger, anxiety, frustration, or contempt. When in fact the sender may simply be excited to share what they have learned or discovered and there is no intention of communicating the previously mentioned emotions.

Avoid Distractions

Avoiding distractions like technology or your immediate surroundings is imperative when communicating

information. When one is distracted while trying to communicate, they can miss important pieces of the message, or negatively affect the level of importance of the topic being discussed. As the listener, it is even more imperative that you place your focus on the one sending you information rather than trying to divide your attention between the sender and your technology. If you are distracted while you are listening you may miss some important information that will make performing / completing your task efficiently and effectively.

Concise

Being concise in your communication means that you stick to the content of your message and minimize or eliminate any tangents that will distract the listener from what you are trying to say. Being concise will greatly help those listening to the message understand more clearly, and perhaps ask better questions so that the core of the message is clearly understood.

REFERENCES

- [1] eCampusOntario; Communication for Business Professionals. 2018. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/>
- [2] eCampusOntario; Communication for Business Professionals. 2018. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/>

Non-Verbal Communication Practices

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate functions from verbal communication. For example, nonverbal communication is primarily based on physical expressions while verbal communication is primarily culturally based. This is evidenced by the fact that some nonverbal communication has the same meaning across cultures while virtually no verbal communication systems share the same universal cultural relevance or recognizability.

BODY LANGUAGE^[1]

Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, the meaning is even harder to discern. You can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages.

Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, posture, and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder a clear understanding of your message, but it doesn’t reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking.

Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Consider one element, facial expressions. What do they mean without the extra context of chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one movement to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element or even a series of elements. How well can you correctly identify the feelings behind facial expressions? The following are a series of images showing people with a variety of facial expressions.



differing facial expressions

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication, you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction.

Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow “do-overs” on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. In your experience, you’ve likely said something you would give anything to take back, and you’ve learned the hard way that you can’t. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still doesn’t erase the original message or its impact.

Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You can’t separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you can’t take it back.

TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION[2]

Now that you have learned about the body language aspect which applies to nonverbal communication, here are eight types of nonverbal communication signals to further understand this challenging aspect of communication:

1. Space
2. Time
3. Physical Characteristics
4. Body movements
5. Touch
6. Paralanguage
7. Artifacts
8. Environment

SPACE



When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often

associated with social rank and is an important part of business communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing “too close” for comfort and not know it.

Territory is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Families or households often mark their space by putting up fences or walls around their houses. This sense of a right to control your space is implicit in the territory.

Territory means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

Among most humans, there is a basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. You may perceive that in your home people sleep one to each bed, but in many cultures, people sleep two or more to a bed and it is considered normal. If you were to share that bed, you might feel uncomfortable, while someone raised with group sleeping norms might feel uncomfortable sleeping alone. From where you stand in an aerobics class in relation to others, to where you place your bookbag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others.

TIME



Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented.

When you give a presentation, does your audience have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor in the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your audience respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the audience stops listening; if the audience perceives that you have “gone over time,” they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS



You didn't choose your genes, your eye color, the natural color of your hair, or your height, but people spend millions every year trying to change their physical characteristics. You can get colored contacts; dye your hair; and if you are shorter than you'd like to be, buy shoes to raise your stature a couple of inches.

However, no matter how much you stoop to appear shorter, you won't change your height until time and age

gradually make itself apparent. If you are tall, you might find the correct shoe size, pant length, or even the length of the mattress a challenge, but there are rewards.

Regardless of your eye or hair color, or even how tall you are, being comfortable with yourself is an important part of your presentation. Act naturally and consider aspects of your presentation you can control in order to maximize a positive image for the audience.

BODY MOVEMENTS



The study of body movements, called kinesics, is key to understanding nonverbal communication.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to a customer about a software program. As you say, “Click on this tab,” you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce each other.

You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say, “Click on the tab,” and then move with your hand to the right, indicating that the customer should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head to indicate that you are listening may encourage the customer to continue asking questions. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages. For example, if the customer makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by customers takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

TOUCH



Before giving your presentation, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. This interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage. Once on stage, most people do not touch audience members physically, but you can interact with audience members through visual aids, note cards, and other objects.

PARALANGUAGE



Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that nonverbal communication was defined as “not involving words” but paralanguage is a unique form of nonverbal communication that exists when we are speaking, using words. Paralanguage involves tone and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including how loudly or softly you are speaking, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you’ve also heard of a pregnant pause, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there, nonetheless. For example, your coworker Jan comes back from a sales meeting speechless. You may ask if the meeting went all right. “Well, ahh...” may be the only response you get. The pause speaks volumes. Something happened, though you may not know what.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought or serve as a sign of respect. Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say.

ARTIFACTS



Do you cover your tattoos when you are at work? Do you know someone who does? Or perhaps you know someone who has a tattoo and does not need to cover it up on their job? Expectations vary a great deal, and body art or tattoos may still be controversial in the workplace. In your trade, a tattoo might be an important visual aid, or it might detract from your effort to communicate professionalism.

Body piercings may express individuality, but you need to consider how they will be interpreted by employers, other trades, professional representatives, and customers.

Artifacts are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to tools, watches, hardhats, toolboxes, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround our selves with communicates something about our sense of self.

Artifacts may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality, and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to the artifacts of others can give you a sense of the self they want to communicate and may allow you to more accurately adapt your message to meet their needs.

ENVIRONMENT



The environment involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in the lunchroom, the environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process.

The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, some general contractors are famous for their attention to job site safety. Some general contractors invest considerable amounts of time and money towards the building of a vibrant safety culture. Their expense is no doubt considerable, but their actions speak volumes.

Key Takeaways

To summarize, nonverbal communication can be categorized into eight types:

1. space,
2. time,
3. physical characteristics,
4. body movements,
5. touch,
6. paralanguage,
7. artifacts,
8. environment.

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[1] eCampusOntario; Communication for Business Professionals. 2018. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/>

[2] eCampusOntario; Communication for Business Professionals. 2018. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/>

Active Listening

Active Listening

The Red Seal Occupational Standard for the trade Plumber states the following about the need for improving our communication skills;

ORAL COMMUNICATION[1]

Plumbers require good oral communication skills to interact with colleagues, apprentices, supervisors, suppliers, inspectors, clients, and other tradespersons when co-ordinating work, resolving problems, and ensuring safety.

WORKING WITH OTHERS[2]

During the course of a workday, plumbers must interact with others such as co-workers, suppliers, clients and other trades.

Given all the communication we do, some would think that we do a good job both in speaking and listening. But in fact, most of us are not as good as we think we are, and the research would suggest that we retain approximately 30% of what we hear.

This means that when we are having a conversation with our supervisors, other journeypeople, or our apprentices, they will only remember three minutes of our ten-minute conversation.

Conversely, when we are being given directions or being presented with new information, we aren't hearing the complete story either. What if the 30% of what we hear turns out to be the least important piece of the whole message?

Listening is a skill and like any skill, it gets better. Listening is a skill that everyone will benefit from and it will improve efficiency and productivity. It will improve your ability to influence, negotiate, and persuade others. In addition, developing our listening skills will help us avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.



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Being someone who actively listens means more than just hearing what others have to say. When you are hearing someone, you are not necessarily paying attention to the content of what is being communicated. You are

primarily just hearing words. This occurs most often when we are distracted within the conversation. Distraction can be present in many different forms, but the most common form of distraction comes from our mobile devices. Trying to pay attention to two forms of communication at the same time will cause you to listen to one more than the other. Typically, this means that we will 'tune out' the one who's speaking because we have placed a higher priority onto the content of our devices rather than the content of the one speaking.

Active listening can be described as having four basic components:

1. Interpreting
2. Reflecting
3. Responding
4. Paraphrasing

Interpreting

When we are interpreting someone's communication, especially verbal communication, we are actively decoding what is being said. In this decoding we are searching for context, meaning, and bias. Ironically this is where most people will interrupt the one who is speaking because the listener has already determined (decoded) the content of the message.

Reflecting

Reflection is close to the paraphrasing phase in the sense that the listener can repeat back what they have just heard in order to seek clarification. However, a larger and more critical component of reflection is in the ability to suspend the urge to interrupt and think through what the other person is saying. Taking a small amount of time to discern the content of the conversation will help minimize misunderstandings and lessen frustration on the speaker's part due to being constantly interrupted. It will also help you to come up with some good questions to use if you need clarification. Asking questions such as, 'can you repeat what you just said', 'is this what you mean?' can vastly improve the communication process.

Responding

Responding to other's communication can be done with both verbal and non-verbal cues. Body language, facial expressions, head nodding, positioning of the arms, and types of breathing (sighs, long drawn breaths) are all examples of response mechanisms. When combined with the previous act of reflecting you can choose your words carefully if the context demands a certain level of diplomacy. Simply looking the person in eye while they talk may prove to be a positive act of responding.

Paraphrasing

This one act may prove to be the most important in developing great listening skills. When you think that you have captured the thoughts and context of the conversation a great way to demonstrate active listening would be to say, 'what I'm hearing you say is...' or 'let me repeat back to you what I just heard you say so that I know I got it right'. It is always good to summarize what you have just heard, especially if getting the message wrong translates into you having to repeat tasks or if it leads to unsafe acts.

Further Reading

[Active Listening](#) posted on the website [Skills You Need](#).

REFERENCES

[1] Red Seal Occupational Standard, Plumber:2015 <http://www.publiccentre.esdc.gc.ca/>

[2] *ibid*

Learning Preferences

Learning styles can be defined as *the way in which an individual generally responds to specific learning situations and prefers to process different forms of information*. Often, learning styles are regarded as the preferred methods for undertaking learning, for example, reader/writer, audio/visual etc., but this is a narrow definition. Learning preferences as a term is generally considered to take in a broader set of factors than just methods as they also take into account aspects that might impact on learning, such as: the environment and where and when apprentices prefer to do their learning. For example, a student may prefer to work alone at home, and do her assignments late in the evening when the family has gone to bed. Another student may thrive in group situations and only wish to study during the day on-campus. In a nutshell, learning styles and preferences help to describe how people learn best in their context.

PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES DEBATE

There has been much debate in the educational circles regarding the validity and application of preferred learning styles. There are basically two competing perspectives.

Learning preferences refer to a set of competing theories that aim to describe the differences in an individual's preferred way of learning. Since its beginning in the 1970s, the topic of learning styles has been under much scrutiny, review, and revision.

Essentially there are four styles or 'preferences' with some theories indicating as many as seven. For the purpose of this chapter, we will be highlighting three preferences that may help you understand how you best learn and assimilate new information and tasks.

It is important to know that most of the literature indicates that although you might prefer one method over the others, you are not using that one method to the exclusion of the others. Although you may prefer one method of learning you are capable of learning and assimilating new information through other means as well.

Learning new material is both an active process as well as an adaptive process. You may find that you are using more than one method at any given time in your learning.



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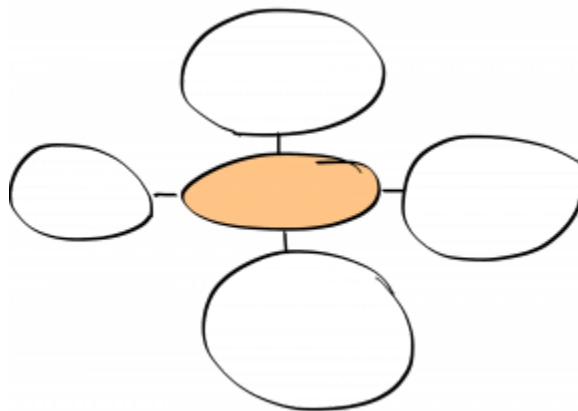
<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=40#oembed-1>

MISCONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING STYLES

Of the different learning styles, we will highlight three:

1. Visual (Spatial Learning),
2. Auditory (Listening/Musical),
3. Kinesthetic (Physical).

Visual Preference (See)



Those who prefer to learn visually usually find that they learn best when there are visual cues or images to help process the information they are trying to learn. Some examples of visual learning experience would include;

- Graphs, charts, and diagrams
- Colour coding
- Visualizations of concepts
- Video (YouTube, Vimeo, Manufacturers Websites)
- Mind mapping (flowcharts, flow diagrams)

Auditory Preference (Hear)



Those who prefer to learn through listening are those who respond primarily to sound. Those who prefer this learning preference find they study better when listening to music or who like to process information by talking out loud. Whether in a group setting or in a discussion with someone else.

Some examples of auditory learning might be:

- Tell me how to do a task
- Discussion groups (tool-box meeting)
- Audio Books / Audio Lectures
- Podcasts

Kinesthetic Preference (Try)



Those who prefer to learn with their hands are most likely to be in some form of skilled trades. It should come as no surprise that kinesthetic learners (physical learners) are animated in their discussions, usually feel a need to keep moving, and learn best when they can practice what they have learned right away – or better yet- while they are learning. This kind of learning is often referred to as ‘hands-on’ learning and is the reason why shop practicals and lab experiences are so important to your learning experience. Some examples of kinesthetic learning might be:

- Prototyping or building models

- Writing, typing
- Highlighting text as you read
- Shop experience
- On the job training
- Exercising
- Experimenting with taking things apart and/or putting things back together -especially when it involves tools of some kind.

OTHER TYPES OF LEARNING PREFERENCES

1. **Verbal or Linguistic** – this learning style can be found in such activities as receiving verbal or written instructions. Those who prefer this style of learning usually enjoy reading and writing, rhymes and riddles, and generally have a large vocabulary.
2. **Logical or Mathematical** – this learning style is not intended to discount other styles as non-sensical or illogical. Rather, this style tends to prefer classifying and/or grouping information together to get a better grasp of what is being taught. This type of learning prefers to create procedures as well as perform complex mathematical problems to better understand their world.
3. **Social or Inter-personal** – this type of learning preference tends to reflect a need for learning in a group environment. These types of learners like to bounce ideas off of others, tend to work well with others, and thus find themselves in more collaborative environments.
4. **Solitary or Intra-personal** – this type of learner prefers to be left on their own to figure out how to best assimilate information. These types of learners prefer to write journals, keep detailed notes, and think independently.

Key Takeaways

Although most people enter the trades because they feel that they learn best with their hands, in reality, all of us learn through more than one preference. Indeed, that is why these are called 'preferences. One person may 'prefer' one way of learning over another. Yet that does not mean they are regulated or hindered in any way from learning in another method. Those other methods just may not be the best way for them to learn.

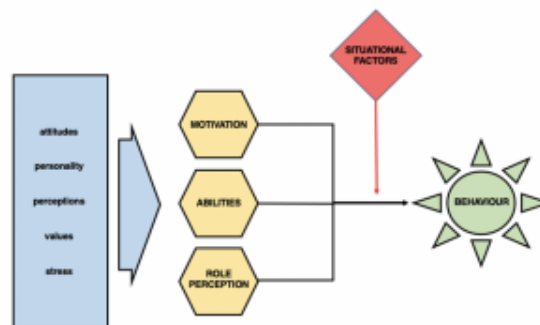
Workplace Responsibilities

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

“Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.” – A. Einstein

Attitude when applied to humans, is best described as, “mental position with regard to a fact or state a helpful attitude; a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state a negative attitude an optimistic attitude.” In essence, it is a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically where that is reflected in a person’s behavior.

With regard to the MARS model of behaviour shown below, attitudes play a key role in influencing behaviours.



Several factors drive, or fuel, our sense of motivation, our ability to perform a task, and how we view ourselves within a specific task or group. In turn, these join together and manifest themselves in our behaviour. You’ll notice that outside influences will affect our motivation, ability, or our perceptions, but only after we have set in motion those attributes with ourselves. This is why, despite our situation or environment, we can for the most part choose our attitude towards a particular event or person or group.

HOW ARE ATTITUDES FORMED?¹

There is considerable disagreement about this question. One view offered by psychologist Barry Staw and others is the dispositional approach, which argues that attitudes represent relatively stable predispositions to respond to people or situations around them. That is, attitudes are viewed almost as personality traits.

Thus, some people would have a tendency—a predisposition—to be happy on the job, almost regardless of the nature of the work itself. Others may have an internal tendency to be unhappy, again almost regardless of the actual nature of the work. Evidence in support of this approach can be found in a series of studies that found that attitudes change very little among people before and after they make a job change. To the extent that these

1. This section is copied from 3.4 Attitudes and Behavior in the open textbook *Organizational Behavior* published by OpenStax under a [CC BY](https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/pages/3-4-attitudes-and-behavior) Licence. <https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/pages/3-4-attitudes-and-behavior>

findings are correct, managers may have little influence over improving job attitudes short of trying to select and hire only those with appropriate dispositions.

A second approach to attitude formation is called the situational approach. This approach argues that attitudes emerge as a result of the uniqueness of a given situation. They are situationally determined and can vary in response to changing work conditions. Thus, as a result of experiences at work (a boring or unrewarding job, a bad supervisor, etc.), people react by developing appropriate attitudes.

Several variations on this approach can be identified. Some researchers suggest that attitudes result largely from the nature of the job experience itself. That is, an employee might reason: "I don't get along well with my supervisor; therefore, I become dissatisfied with my job." To the extent that this accurately describes how attitudes are formed, it also implies that attitudes can be changed relatively easily.

For example, if employees are dissatisfied with their job because of conflicts with supervisors, either changing supervisors or changing the supervisors' behavior may be viable means of improving employee job attitudes. In other words, if attitudes are largely a function of the situation, then attitudes can be changed by altering the situation.

Attitudes are often informed by what we think and what we value. Attitudes are often reflected in our emotions and feelings. These emotions and feelings will drive our motivations and have a direct effect on our perceptions of where we fit within a particular situation or group of people. Therefore, it is important to remember a few key points about the relationship of our attitude to our personal work responsibilities;

1. The only person responsible for our attitudes, emotions, and feelings is ourselves.
2. Due to the powerful nature of our attitude, we must remember that attitude informs behaviour, not vice versa.
3. In most circumstances, our level of performance – both in our work and with others, is a reflection of our attitudes. If we carry a low or poor attitude towards a task or a person, then our interactions within the task or with the person will be correspondingly low.

Attitudes and Behaviour

The relationship between our attitudes and our behaviour can also manifest itself in the form of harassment and discrimination.

Harassment often linked with the act of Bullying, as defined by WorkSafe BC is:

"Bullying and harassment in the workplace can take many forms, including verbal aggression, personal attacks, and other intimidating or humiliating behaviours."

Further, a person is bullied and harassed when someone takes an action that he or she knew or reasonably ought to have known would cause that worker to be humiliated or intimidated.

Examples of behaviour or comments that might constitute bullying and harassment include verbal aggression or insults, calling someone derogatory names, harmful hazing or initiation practices, vandalizing personal belongings, and spreading malicious rumours.





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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=44#oembed-1>

If workplace bullying and harassment are not addressed, it can lead to lost productivity, anxiety, depression, and injuries at work.

NOVA SCOTIA HUMAN RIGHTS

All employees have the right to work without discrimination. The prohibited grounds of discrimination in the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Act](#) include **protected characteristics** in combination with a **prohibited area**.²

Protected Characteristics:

- Age
- Race
- Colour
- Religion
- Creed
- Ethnic, national or aboriginal origin
- Sex (including pregnancy and pay equity)
- Sexual orientation
- Physical disability
- Mental disability
- Family status
- Marital status
- Source of income
- Harassment (and sexual harassment)
- Irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease
- Association with protected groups or individuals
- Political belief, affiliation or activity
- Gender Identity
- Gender Expression
- Retaliation

2. Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.(n.d.). *Know your rights – For individuals*. <https://humanrights.novascotia.ca/know-your-rights/individuals>

Prohibited Areas:

- Employment
- Housing or accommodation
- Services and facilities (such as stores, restaurants or provincially funded programs)
- Purchase or sale of property
- Volunteer public service
- Publication, broadcasting or advertisement
- Membership in a professional, business or trade association, or employers' or employees' organization

Watch the following video for an overview of the Nova Scotia Humans Rights Act and the protected characteristics and prohibited areas.



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Harassment and discrimination can take many forms. Engaging in any of these behaviours is patently wrong and must be addressed and corrected. The following information from the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum paints a clear picture of the reality of this important issue.

*Apprentices and journeypersons provided these **INSIGHTS** based upon their experiences at technical training and at the workplace:*

16%



Respondents reported observing or experiencing **BULLYING** at **TECHNICAL TRAINING**.

31%



Respondents reported observing or experiencing **BULLYING** at the **WORKPLACE**.

42%



WOMEN were more likely than **MEN** (28%) to agree that they have observed bullying or harassment in the workplace.

14%



of survey respondents intend to **LEAVE THE TRADES** due to bullying.

Individuals are bullied because of their **GENDER**, their **ABILITY** to do the job and **RACE**.

Many employers have policies and procedures for dealing with this destructive behaviour. The role of the human resource coordinator or department can help both the employee and the employer address issues such as these in the workplace. Many times, attitudes can be changed through awareness training, workshops, and toolbox meetings which specifically address the issue without singling out individuals. This has proven to make a marked difference in harassment and discrimination on the job site.

The need for this kind of training, awareness, and practice could not be emphasized enough. The skilled trades are losing too many qualified people. Be sure to check below for some links that will offer information and help for all parties.

In the past, bullying and harassment types of behaviour of journeypersons to apprentices were deemed 'part of the job'. In fact, many thought it came with the territory of being a tradesperson. That kind of behavior is and never was, acceptable. More now than ever, organizations are not only recognizing that the past should never dictate the future but the time for change is now.

- [Nova Scotia Preventing Harassment in the Workplace Report](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Nova Scotia Human Rights Act](#)
- [Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission Fact Sheet](#)
- [Know Your Rights](#) from Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission
- [Nova Scotia Workplace and Technical Safety Information Services](#)

Toolbox Meetings

A toolbox meeting is an informal safety meeting, usually held on-site and before the official start of the day, which focuses on safety-related topics and issues. These issues can incidents which may have happened the prior day, or they may cover important specific safety topics (eg. Ladder use, PPE, Fire Safety, etc.), or workplace hazards that might be encountered that particular day.

TOOLBOX MEETINGS

Meetings are usually short in duration and are typically recorded through documentation. This documentation is usually referred to as a 'Field Level Risk Assessment' (FLRA) or a Site-Specific Safety Requirement (SSSR).

Toolbox meetings are an effective method for reviewing and refreshing common safety concerns as well as raising the safety awareness within a crew. They are designed as an information exchange where everyone participating can contribute their knowledge and experience.

Toolbox meetings are also designed to facilitate health and safety concerns on the job site and assist in promoting a company's safety culture.



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=48#oembed-1>

An example of a document used for the purpose of a toolbox meeting may look like the following;

BCCSA BC Construction Safety Alliance **Train. Maintain. Sustain.**

Toolbox Talks

Weekly Tailgate Topic	12-7
Discuss with crews on	[INSERT DATE]
LADDER SAFETY	

Ladders can be used safely if they are given the respect they deserve. If you require assistance in setting up a ladder, ask a fellow worker for help. Prior to using any ladder, make sure that it is in good condition and is the right ladder for the job.

1. When setting up a ladder, secure the base and "walk" the ladder up into place.
2. The ladder should be set at the proper angle of one (1) horizontal to every four (4) vertical. As a general rule of thumb, when you are setting a ladder up, the base of the ladder should be at your feet and the ladder should be at arms length at your shoulder height.
3. Before using a ladder, make sure it is secured against movement.
4. When in position, the ladder should protrude one (1) meter above the intended landing point.
5. Workers shall not work from the top two rungs of a ladder.



www.clipart.com - 3554

WorkSafeBC has an example page of toolbox items that might be included in a typical meeting. The following is an example of what topics may be included in a toolbox meeting;

WORKSAFE BC WORKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE worksafebc.com **TOOLBOX MEETING GUIDE** 

Toolbox meeting checklist

Choose a safety topic

- ☐ Choose a topic relevant to the work the crew is doing.

Be prepared

- ☐ Inspect the jobsite for hazards related to your topic.
- ☐ Read over the material you plan to cover.
- ☐ Make sure you are familiar with any regulations, guidelines and company rules related to the day's topic.
- ☐ Review reports of recent accidents on the site, including "near misses."

Get the crew actively involved in the meeting

- ☐ Choose a real-life example (case study) to talk about.
- ☐ Invite the crew to ask questions and make suggestions related to the topic.
- ☐ Respond to questions that you can answer, and offer to find answers you don't know.
- ☐ Allow time at the end of the meeting for questions and suggestions on any safety issue.
- ☐ Ask the crew for feedback about the meeting.
- ☐ Involve the crew in preparing for and/or leading future safety meetings.

Follow up

- ☐ Look into complaints, concerns, and suggestions that the crew brought up.
- ☐ Report back to the crew to let them know what will be done.
- ☐ Keep good records of each toolbox meeting.

MORE THAN STATS...

The most recent statistics from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) tell us that in 2017, 951 workplace fatalities were recorded in Canada, an increase of 46 from the previous year. Among these deaths were 23 young workers aged 15-24.

Add to these fatalities the 251,508 accepted claims (an increase from 241,508 the previous year) for lost time due to a work-related injury or disease, including 31,441 from workers aged 15-24, and the fact that these statistics only include what is reported and accepted by the compensation boards, there is no doubt that the total number of workers impacted is even greater.

And it's not just these numbers on which we need to reflect. With each worker tragedy, there are loved ones, family members, friends, and co-workers who are directly affected, left behind, and deeply impacted – their lives also forever changed.^[1]

- [Toolbox Talks resources](#) from BC Construction Safety Alliance
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Day of Mourning](#)
- [Safety and Prevention Resources](#) from the Workers Compensation Board of Nova Scotia

REFERENCES

[1] Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – <https://www.ccohs.ca/events/mourning/>

EFFECTIVE MENTORING TECHNIQUES

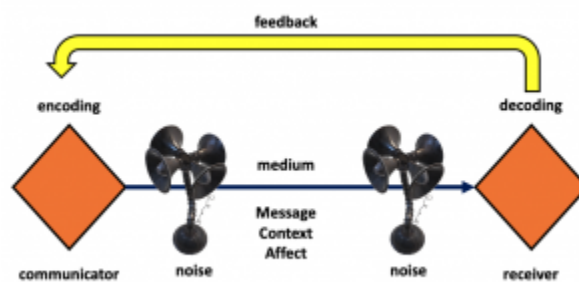
Verbal Mentoring Techniques

As a tradesperson, it is important to understand that we all require good to great communication skills. Interacting with our apprentices, other journeypeople, supervisors, suppliers, clients, and other professionals demand that we pay attention to how we communicate our messages. Both verbally and non-verbally.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

It is not surprising that one of the top skills employers are searching for in hiring new people is their ability to communicate clearly and effectively with others. Acquiring good communication skills is imperative to coordinating work schedules and duties, resolving conflicts, and ensuring people stay safe on the job site.

We may not realize what is happening when we are engaged in a conversation with someone, but there is a process of communication. The following figure illustrates the process;



Encoding

Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. The encoder uses a 'medium' to send the message — a phone call, email, text message, face-to-face meeting, or other communication tools. The level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages may vary. The encoder should also take into account any 'noise' that might interfere with their messages, such as other messages, distractions, or influences.

Decoding

Your apprentice then 'decodes', or interprets, the message for themselves. Decoding is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you are running low on materials and encode the following message to send to your apprentice: "We need some more materials. Can you run down to the material trailer and grab some more?" As your apprentice receives the message, they decode your communication and turn it back into thoughts to make meaning.

Feedback

When your apprentice responds to your question, intentionally or unintentionally, that apprentice is providing feedback. Feedback is composed of messages the receiver sends back to the one communicating. Verbal or nonverbal, feedback signals allow the source to see how well, how accurately (or how poorly and inaccurately) the message was received.

Medium

The medium is the channel or the way a message (or group of messages) travels between the communicator and the receiver(s). Mediums would include face to face conversations, phone calls and messages, text messages, direct messaging, purchase orders, requests for information, emails, blogs, podcasts, tweets.

Message

The message brings together words to convey meaning. Although the communication process also includes how those messages are conveyed. For example, when you are communicating to your supervisor, roughly eighty to ninety (80%-90%) is non-verbal and only ten percent (10%) are actual words. It is also important to note that bias (what a person thinks) has an effect on the words chosen (coded) for the message as well as how the message is received (decoded).

Context

This is referred to as context. The context of the communication process includes such things as location, people involved, the content of the message, and expectations of the communicator and the receiver. The context may also include environmental cues such as clothing, the number of people involved in the communication, and specific trades language (nuance or lingo).

Noise

Noise, also referred to as interference, can come from any source. Noise is anything that blocks or changes the communicator's intended meaning of the message being conveyed. This can include actual external noise from machinery and tools but also could range from the internal noise (bias) of the receiver to the communicator's or receiver's emotions and feeling in a particular given moment of the day. Essentially, noise interferes with normal encoding and decoding of the message carried by the medium between communicator and receiver.

Non-Verbal Mentoring Techniques

Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, the meaning is even harder to discern. You can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IS FLUID

Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture, and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder a clear understanding of your message, but it doesn't reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking. Nonverbal communication is far from simple, and its complexity makes your study and your understanding a worthy but challenging goal.

Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Consider one element, facial expressions. What do they mean without the extra context of chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one movement to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element or even a series of elements. How well can you correctly identify the feelings behind facial expressions?

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication, you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction. Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow “do-overs” on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. In your experience, you've likely said something you would give anything to take back, and you've learned the hard way that you can't. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still does not erase the original message or its impact. Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You cannot separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you cannot take it back.

Body Language

Nonverbal communication can be very ambiguous. We should not presume that we can ‘read other people's

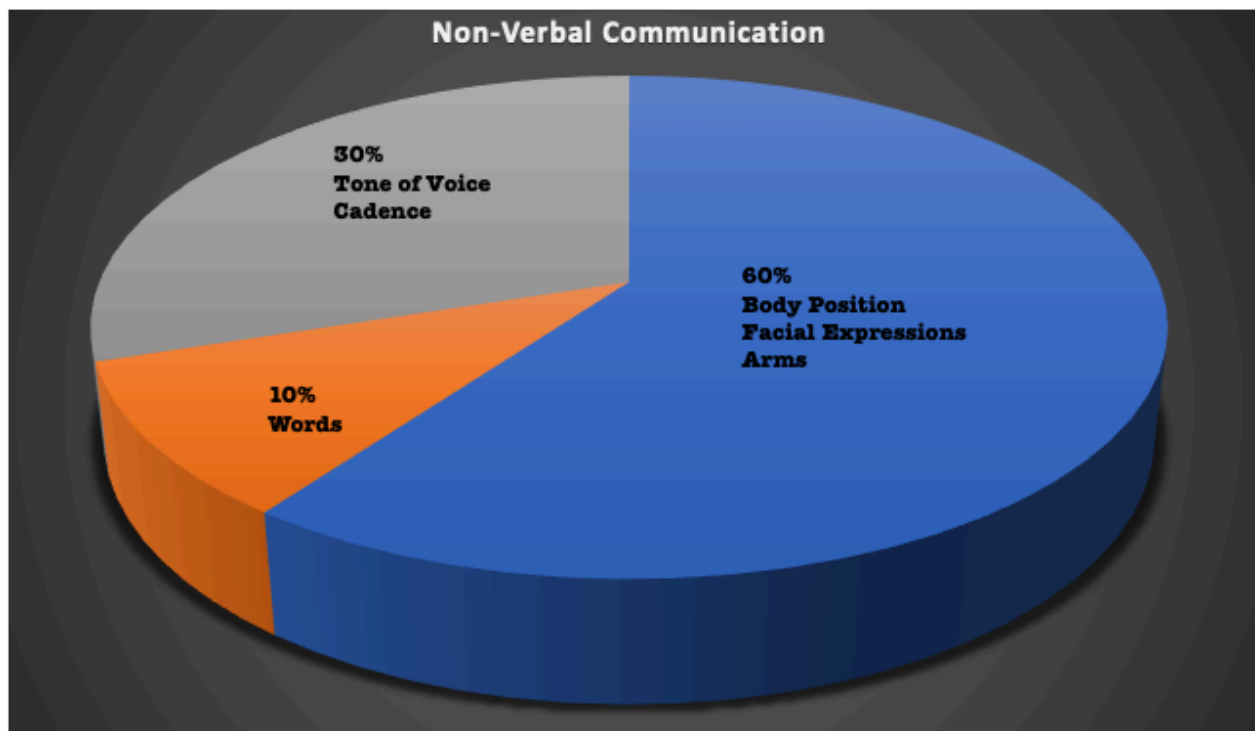
minds' because of what we think they are 'saying' nonverbally. We may be right, but equally, we may be wrong. To be clear, nonverbal communication contains more than just one component or aspect of conveying messages.



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Communication should be regarded as a system. We cannot separate one part of the system from another and then, in isolation, interpret what is being communicated. To assist us in becoming more accurate in our decoding, we need to understand there are three sub-systems to communication. They are illustrated below



As illustrated, roughly ten percent of what we are communicating is actually in words. The other ninety percent is comprised of non-verbal tactics.

Head Movements

It may not be as simple as that, however, as we now know such nonverbal communication can often be culture-specific. While the positive head nod and negative headshake are commonly understood around the world, they

are far from universal. In parts of Bulgaria and Greece, for example, nodding means no. In parts of the former Yugoslavia and southern India, shaking the head signifies yes.

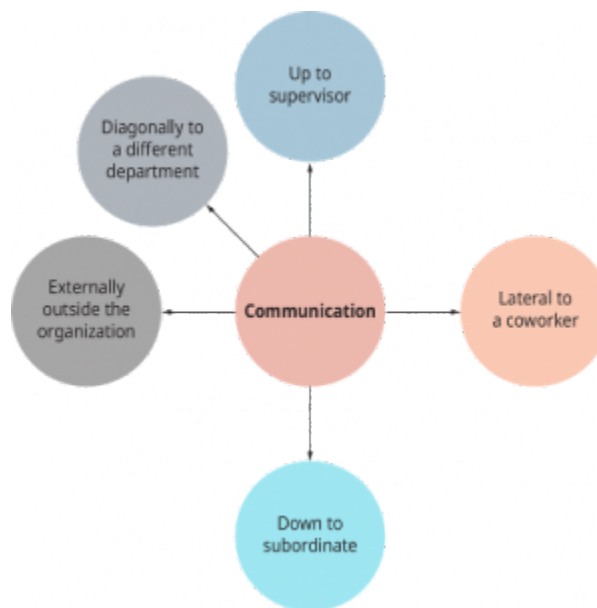
In conversation, when people agree with the speaker, they tend to nod as the other speaks. If a person doesn't nod, we may deduce that he or she disagrees with the speaker.

This type of non-verbal communication is often referred to as backchanneling and could be regarded as the feedback mechanism we discussed in the previous chapter. When we are listening effectively, we give nonverbal feedback by nodding, smiling, and even respond with sounds. (e.g. 'Uh-huh')

Oftentimes individuals in conversation who wish to take over the conversation may increase their rate of head-nods, lean forward in their seats, or gesture for attention with their hand.

Signals

Communication is a social process, as it takes at least two people to engage in communication. There is a variety of social influences that can affect the accuracy of the intended message. For example, status barriers between apprentices at different levels of the organization can have an influence on how one communicates. Also issues such as addressing your boss as "Mr. Jamieson" or your journeyman as "Mike" can vary depending on context and circumstance. Prevailing norms and roles can dictate who speaks to whom and how someone responds. As what may happen when a monthly meeting occurs where different stakeholders meet to discuss reasons for why a project has fallen behind schedule. Diagram 1 illustrates a variety of communications that illustrate social influences in the workplace.



In addition, the communication process is heavily influenced by perceptual processes. Meaning, the process of communication can be heavily influenced by what a person thinks, believes, or feels. The extent to which an employee accurately receives and decodes job instructions from a supervisor may be influenced by her perception of the supervisor, especially if the job instructions conflict with her interest in the job or if they are controversial. If an apprentice has stereotyped the journeyman as incompetent, chances are that little that what the journeyman says will be taken seriously. If the boss is well regarded or seen as influential in the company or the industry, everything that she says may be interpreted as important.

Gestures

Gestures involve using your arms and hands while communicating. Gestures provide a way to channel your nervous energy into a positive activity that benefits your speech and gives you something to do with your hands. For example, watch people in normal, everyday conversations. They frequently use their hands to express themselves. Do you think they think about how they use their hands? Most people do not. Their arm and hand gestures come naturally as part of their expression, often reflecting what they have learned within their community.

For senior apprentices and journeypeople, this is also true, and deliberate movement can reinforce, repeat, and even regulate an apprentice's response to their verbal and nonverbal messages. If you want to help your communication come across as comfortable and natural, the way in which you use of your arms and hands contributes to your message, both in coding and decoding. We can easily recognize that a well-chosen gesture can help make the point understandable and lead the apprentice to the main point of what is being communicated.

Facial Gestures

Facial gestures should reflect the tone and emotion of your verbal communication. Displaying no emotion through your facial gestures can lead to a miscommunication or worse, a misunderstanding in the decoding process. Often it is best to be yourself when communicating your message, however, one needs to understand how their facial gestures communicate their decoding process. This kind of gesture is what the speaker looks for in the feedback mechanisms of communication and can become an integral part of helping each person convey they have understood the message.

Eye contact refers to the speaker's gaze that deliberately engages those in the conversation. It can vary in degree and length, and in many cases, is culturally influenced. Both in the speaker's expectations and the receiver's notion of what is appropriate will influence normal expectations for eye contact. Depending on the culture, eye contact (or the lack thereof) may be nonverbal signals of active listening.

Key Takeaways

Understanding how those you work with interpret these signals is important to how you communicate your message and is critical when it comes to decoding nonverbal expectations.

Active Listening

The Red Seal Occupational Standard for the trade Plumber states the following about the need for improving our communication skills:

Oral Communication[1]

Plumbers require good oral communication skills to interact with colleagues, apprentices, supervisors, suppliers, inspectors, clients and other tradespersons when co-ordinating work, resolving problems, and ensuring safety.

Working with Others[2]

During the course of a workday, plumbers must interact with others such as co-workers, suppliers, clients, and other trades.

Given all the communication we do, some would think that we do a good job both in speaking and listening. But in fact, most of us are not as good as we think we are, and the research would suggest that we retain approximately 30% of what we hear.

This means that when we are having a conversation with our supervisors, other journeypeople, or our apprentices, they will only remember three minutes of our ten-minute conversation.

Conversely, when we are being given directions or being presented with new information, we aren't hearing the complete story either. What if the 30% of what we hear turns out to be the least important piece of the whole message?

Listening is a skill and like any skill, it gets better. Listening is a skill that everyone will benefit from and it will improve efficiency and productivity. It will improve your ability to influence, negotiate, and persuade others. In addition, developing our listening skills will help us avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.



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Being someone who actively listens means more than just hearing what others have to say. When you are hearing someone, you are not necessarily paying attention to the content of what is being communicated. You are primarily just hearing words. This occurs most often when we are distracted within the conversation. Distraction

can be present in many different forms, but the most common form of distraction comes from our mobile devices. Trying to pay attention to two forms of communication at the same time will cause you to listen to one more than the other. Typically, this means that we will 'tune out' the one who's speaking because we have placed a higher priority onto the content of our devices rather than the content of the one speaking.

ACTIVE LISTENING CAN BE DESCRIBED AS HAVING FOUR BASIC COMPONENTS.



Interpreting

When we are interpreting someone's communication, especially verbal communication, we are actively decoding what is being said. In this decoding, we are searching for context, meaning, and bias. Ironically this is where most people will interrupt the one who is speaking because the listener has already determined (decoded) the content of the message.

Reflecting

Reflection is close to the paraphrasing phase in the sense that the listener can repeat back what they have just heard in order to seek clarification. However, a larger and more critical component of reflection is in the ability to suspend the urge to interrupt and think through what the other person is saying. Taking a small amount of time to discern the content of the conversation will help minimize misunderstandings and lessen frustration on the speaker's part due to being constantly interrupted. It will also help you to come up with some good questions to use if you need clarification. Asking questions such as, 'can you repeat what you just said', 'is this what you mean?' can vastly improve the communication process.

Responding

Responding to other's communication can be done with both verbal and non-verbal cues. Body language, facial expressions, head nodding, positioning of the arms, and types of breathing (sighs, long-drawn breaths) are all examples of response mechanisms. When combined with the previous act of reflecting you can choose your words carefully if the context demands a certain level of diplomacy. Simply looking the person in eye while they talk may prove to be a positive act of responding.

Paraphrasing

This one act may prove to be the most important in developing great listening skills. When you think that you have captured the thoughts and context of the conversation a great way to demonstrate active listening would be to say, 'what I'm hearing you say is...' or 'let me repeat back to you what I just heard you say so that I know I got it right'. It is always good to summarize what you have just heard, especially if getting the message wrong translates into you having to repeat tasks or if it leads to unsafe acts.

Resources

- [Use Interpersonal Communication Skills – 2nd Edition](#) [Trades Access Common Core Competency B-3] open textbook by Camosun College.
- [Communication for Business Professionals](#). 2018.
- [Red Seal Skills for success \(Essential Skills\) summary](#)
- [Active Listening](#) posted on Skills You Need website.

REFERENCES

[1] Red Seal Occupational Standard, Plumber:2015 – <http://www.publicentre.esdc.gc.ca/>

[2] ibid

Mentoring Strategies

As you begin to embark on your career and begin to interact and utilize your own apprentice(s), there are several roles with which you will have to become comfortable. Those roles are interpersonal, informal, and decisional. Captured within these three roles are four learning strategies that should be considered when working with apprentices; coaching, practicing, assessing, and reinforcement. These are described below.

ROLES OF THE MENTOR

Interpersonal Roles

Mentors are required to interact with a substantial number of people during a workweek. They may have conversations or meetings with other journeypeople, supervisors, site supervisors or managers, project teams, owners, suppliers, and the general public. Numerous studies have shown that good relationships are the backbone for getting things done and increasing efficiency as well as effectiveness. Relationships are the richest source of information for mentors because of their personal nature and their immediate impact upon daily operations.

Mentors are also responsible for the work of the people in their unit, and their actions in this regard are directly related to their role as a leader. The influence of senior apprentices and/or journeypeople is most clearly seen in the leadership/mentorship role. Formal authority to train others rests upon them and provides an opportunity for great potential in personal and professional growth. Their leadership determines, in a large degree, how successful they will become as well as how successful and confident their apprentices become.



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Does the leader's/mentor's role matter? Just ask any journey person who has accomplished great things in their career. Did they work hard to achieve their current status? Yes, but they will also talk about how specific mentors helped them grow in understanding not only the technical aspects of their craft but also the interpersonal aspects as well.

Informational Roles

Mentors are required to gather, collate, analyze, store, and disseminate many kinds of information. In doing so, they become information resource centers, often storing huge amounts of information in their own heads, moving quickly from the role of gatherer to the role of disseminator in minutes. Although many business organizations install large, expensive management information systems to perform many of those functions, nothing can match the speed and intuitive power of a well-trained mentor's brain for information processing. Not surprisingly, most mentors prefer it that way.

In the informational role, mentors pass privileged information directly to subordinates, who might otherwise have no access to it. Mentors must decide not only who should receive such information, but how much of it, how often, and in what form. Increasingly, mentors are being asked to decide whether subordinates, peers, customers, business partners, and others should have direct access to information without having to contact the mentor directly.



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Decisional Roles

Ultimately, mentors are charged with the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of both the organization and the apprentices with an interest in both. Such decisions are often made under circumstances of high ambiguity and with inadequate information. Often, the other two mentor roles—interpersonal and informational—will assist a mentor in making difficult decisions in which outcomes are not clear and interests are often conflicting.

Mentors who take a longer-term view of their responsibilities are among the first to realize that they will need to reinvent themselves and their ways of modeling tasks and behaviours as older methods become obsolete and the digital era evolves over time.

Crises can arise because poor mentors let circumstances deteriorate or spin out of control. Conversely, good to great mentors find themselves in the midst of a crisis that they may not have anticipated but must react in and through it just the same.

This third role involves making decisions about who gets what, how much, when, and why. Resources, including time, equipment, human labor, or production space are all limited. Mentors must make sensible decisions about such matters while still retaining, motivating, and developing the best of their apprentices.

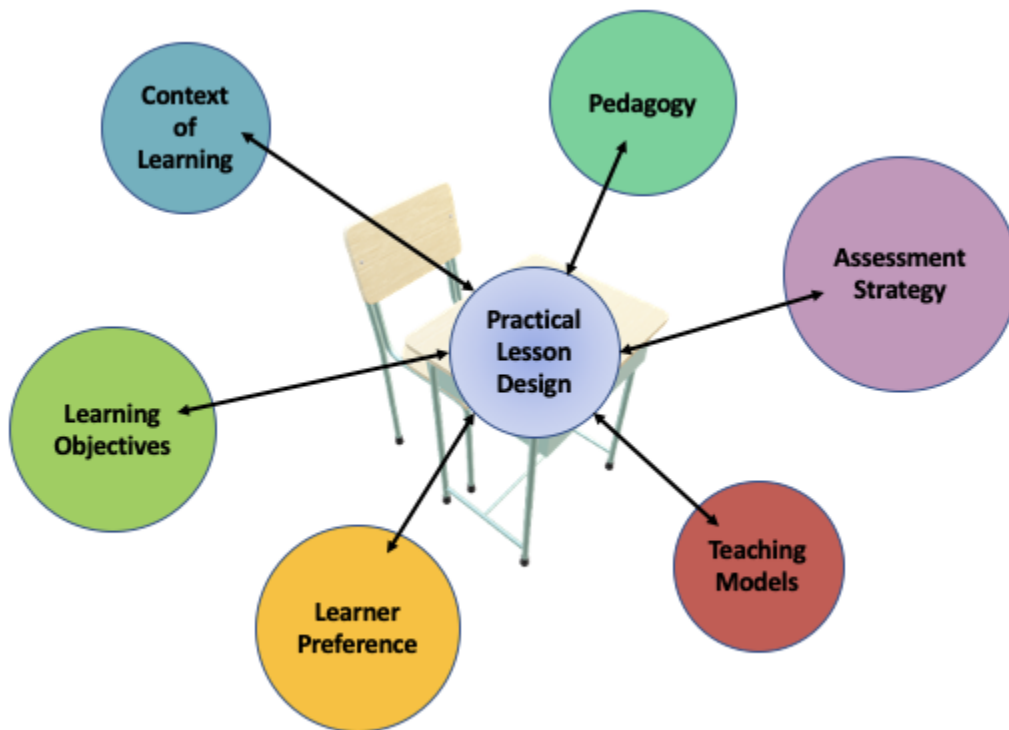
Watch the following video and although the setting is about mentoring new teachers, the principles are very transferrable to the context of mentoring/coaching in the skilled trades. With which role would you relate more? The mentor or the mentored?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=64#oembed-3>

HOW TO BEST PREPARE



In a report from the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum^[1] it was reported that journeyperson mentors can best prepare themselves for their mentoring role by remembering these key aspects;

1. Learning about different styles of learning and communication.
2. Knowing what they want to teach their apprentices.
3. Choosing the right context to teach/model those skills.
4. Learning about how to best get the concept communicated to their apprentice (pedagogy).
5. Knowing what to look for and how to correct mistakes (assessment strategy).
6. Choosing different teaching models to ensure



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=64#oembed-4>

Finally, the last three practices that any mentor in the trades should have to consider is the role and practice of actually practicing what you want to teach, assessing the apprentice, and reinforcing the good skills and behavior while maximizing learning opportunities for both you and your apprentice.

Practicing

Practicing what you want to teach goes far beyond what your actual craft demands of and from you. Of course, there is an important aspect of actually looking for mastery in your craft. But there also resides within the role of practitioner the concept of asking your apprentice to demonstrate behaviours that you are also willing to participate.

For example, are you constantly late? Late to arrive and late from getting back to work after your scheduled breaks? While at the same time demanding that your apprentice show up on time (actually, if we're honest we want our apprentices to show up early), and return back to work on time? This kind of behaviour may work with you because of your role and influence but it also teaches those under your stewardship that you do not respect anyone but yourself.

However, with regard to practicing, it is important to have the apprentice practice with a new skill that you have taught them. In some cases, this practice can occur right within the actual task, most times right beside you and under your direct supervision. In other contexts, you might want to consider having the apprentice demonstrate their understanding of the skill where the impact of making a mistake, and thus causing damage, can be minimized or eliminated. This may also provide the apprentice with a sense of confidence knowing that what they do right or wrong will not jeopardize the overall goal of the project.

Assessing

Assessment is not confined to the technical training institution's classroom, lab, or shop area. Often the most effective assessment happens on the job and when the journeyperson is directly supervising the work.

In educational terms, there are two basic forms of assessment. Formative and summative. Formative assessment (on-going assessment) is the kind of assessment that is given during the time the apprentice is performing a particular task. This would necessitate the journeyperson being right beside the apprentice. However, with this type of assessment the apprentice is offered the opportunity to make small corrections, often in real-time, to correct any minor errors or omissions while maintaining a mandate of completing the task on time and without going back to fix any errors. Summative assessment (final assessments) is the kind of assessment that occurs after the work is completed. This type of assessment allows for room for the apprentice to feel in control of mastering their skill, yet with one significant drawback. If there are any errors or omissions, the apprentice must go back and fix them. This could cause a strain on time and resources which is why in most cases, this type of assessment is reserved for more advanced learners.

As with any assessment strategy, several factors play key roles in determining assessment outcomes. For both the apprentice as well as the journey person. They are:

1. What do you want to assess?
 1. Knowledge and understanding?
 2. Technical / Practical Skills?
 3. Functional Skills (Essential Skills)?
2. How are you going to perform the assessment?
 1. Self-assessment?
 2. Peer-assessment?
 3. Spot Inspections?
 4. Industry Inspections?

Feedback

When performing any kind of feedback mechanism for learning it is important to keep in mind the need to be paying more attention to the present and the future rather than the past. Effective feedback can be very motivating as well as increase the confidence of your apprentices. Conversely, poorly constructed or communicated feedback can have the opposite effect and even influence the future performance of an apprentice. Practicing poor feedback mechanisms under the guise of your own personal experience as an apprentice is not only outdated and wrong, it does nothing to increase the professionalism of your craft.

In offering feedback, the mentor may consider employing the 'What Went Well' method as well as the 'Even Better If...' method. Focusing on what went well for the apprentice highlights their ability to perform some, if not most of, the skill(s) you are trying to teach. Using this type of method encourages the apprentice to critically think their way through the process and actually enables the apprentice to learn at a deeper level. Which leads to better retention and higher confidence.

Having the apprentice tell what might have been even better will further strengthen the learning moment and actually go a long way in building another potential mentor within your craft. An essential skill, critical thinking, not only encourages troubleshooting skills it also supports decision making processes and communication skills.

Reinforcing

The methods we choose to provide our feedback will either reinforce a growth mindset or a fixed mindset perspective. Those apprentices with a growth mindset often advance through their careers to become future supervisors or even contractors or business owners. The growth type of mindsets often encourages others to learn from their mistakes and thus reinforce their learning to deeper levels. As another essential skill, continuous learning is based primarily on a growth mindset. If an apprentice believes that they have the capacity to learn more technical skills, then they can manage changes that might occur in their chosen field due to changes in technology or in the type of tools and resources available.

Those with a fixed mindset often view themselves as people who cannot learn very much, have always suffered setbacks and even prejudices due to the application of poor feedback methods. If they believe that they cannot learn from their mistakes they are less likely to take on additional responsibilities and may even face temptations to cover up their mistakes. This is why it is so critical for the mentor to become familiar with the different learning preferences of those they mentor. Empowering your apprentice(s) to develop a growth mindset flows from your

type of feedback and reinforcing strategies. They will begin to understand that their failures are not a reflection of their intelligence and thus your apprentices will become more resilient as well as becoming more confident to seek out solutions for their problems on their own.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/tradescomm/?p=64#oembed-5>

Resources

OpenStax Organizational Behaviour
Canadian Apprenticeship Forum: Effective Journey person Apprentice Mentoring on the job: Tips, Strategies, and Resources. 2013.
Ingle, S., & Duckworth, V. (2013). *Teaching and training vocational learners*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

REFERENCES

[1] Canadian Apprenticeship Forum: Effective Journey person-Apprentice Mentoring. 2013

Version History

CHANGES TO NSCC EDITION

- Hierarchical tagging structure added.
- Spacing used for style removed and replaced with changes to style sheet.
- New heading tags added when required to improve navigation for text to speech tools.
- Links embedded in meaningful text.
- Nova Scotia resources added. Some BC specific resources removed.
- Dead links removed.