

Be Self-Aware When Communicating¹

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Organizations are all about relationships—relationships among employees and relationships with customers, vendors, other organizations, people in the community, and governmental agencies.

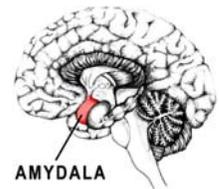
Communicating Effectively Is An Essential Skill Needed To Develop Strong And Productive Relationships.

Communication is something that most of us take for granted. It seems like we've always known how to talk and we've always known how to listen. We can't remember a time when we were not able to do either. It seems so simple. That's why we take it for granted. But it's not as simple as it may appear. To communicate effectively it is important for us to truly know who we are and how that influences are communication.

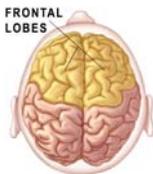
By the time we reach adulthood, each of us is a unique human being. Our uniqueness comes from a combination of natural, inborn differences and different life experiences. Most people are not fully aware of the influence of their uniqueness on the way they communicate with others. It is a far more powerful influence than you might think. Let's take a moment to look at the source of our uniqueness.

Behavioral scientists talk about a person's *temperament*. Roughly defined, it means: "the traits you were born with." It appears to be a function of your unique neurological characteristics. It is something natural to you, something you take for granted, like being left or right handed. If you are left handed, you could train yourself to be right handed, but it would not be easy. If you are a naturally spontaneous, a take-things-as-they-come kind of person, it is hard for you to be very planned and organized.

As an example of temperament, consider the decades of studies that Jerome Kagan, a Harvard developmental psychologist, has been conducting with children. He concludes that *timid* and *bold* temperaments are the result of different patterns of brain activity. Brain scans show that they are due to the excitability level of a neural circuit located in the amygdala of the brain. Timid (shy) people are born with an amygdala that is easily aroused. As a result, they are quicker to become anxious in an unfamiliar situation. On the other hand, bold people are born with a less excitable amygdala. As a result, they are less easily frightened and more willing to step out and explore unfamiliar environments. These two temperaments appear to be related to the psychological types know as *introvert* and *extravert*.



Another researcher has determined that pessimism and optimism temperaments, like timid and bold, also seem to be a function of our neural circuitry. Dr. Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin suggests that these two temperaments are associated with the right and left prefrontal areas of the brain. Greater activity in the left frontal lobe is associated with people who are more often negative in their outlook toward life, more upset when things happen, and suffer more from depression. Greater activity in the right frontal lobe is associated with people who more often have a positive outlook on life, bounce back from any adversity, and generally are very cheerful.



¹ From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm> Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: www.arniedahlke.com

Being fully aware of your own natural temperament and how it can affect your communication with others is essential to developing effective communication.

Following is an example, drawn from my experience working with salespeople.

In coaching a young salesman, I found him to be very outgoing, very extraverted. His natural tendency was to be energetic, to talk freely, to be very animated in his facial expressions and body movements. I noticed that he, without even thinking about it, expected the same behavior from others. If his customer had a similar outgoing temperament, he had no problem—communication between the two was easy.



On the other hand, when he was meeting with a customer who had a shy, introverted temperament, he had difficulty communicating. While the outgoing salesman literally thought out loud, the introverted customer preferred to pause and think before saying anything. As a result, the customer became silent for a moment or two before responding to a statement or a question from the salesman. That moment of communication silence was uncomfortable for the salesman. He rushed to fill the conversational

void by talking more. The customer ended up experiencing the salesman as being insensitive and very pushy.

Many researchers argue that these temperaments are with us from birth. However, from that point on, our life experiences either reinforce them to be stronger or modify them to be more balanced. For example, an introvert raised in a family of extraverts, often learns to function as an extravert when an occasion requires it, such as a social gathering. But, it takes more effort for that introvert to be outgoing than it does for an extravert, for whom it just comes naturally.

From birth throughout our adulthood, the very words we use—essential elements of our communication—are affected by our life experiences. Influenced by our culture, our families, and our peer groups, our words pick up various shades of meaning, as a function of what is happening when we use them. Some become charged with negative meaning, others become charged with positive meaning, and still others remain neutral.

Given my unique temperaments and the words I use—loaded with my own shades of meaning—I communicate with you. I start with an idea in mind. I then search for the right words to convey it to you. My selection of words depends on my intent. Why do I decide to say something to you? No matter how quickly I choose words for conveying what I want to communicate, my selection of words is based on my reason—my motivation—for saying them to you. Maybe I am trying to force you to do something, so I choose threatening phrases. Or maybe I am trying to please you, so I choose sentences that are designed to make you feel good. Maybe I simply want to convey information to you, so I choose words that I believe will most objectively do that.

To make it even more complicated, I may not even be fully aware of the *why* behind what I am saying. For example, I could be feeling defensive and not even realize that I am “stacking the deck” with negative charges.

Further, I need to be aware of *how* I speak those words—my *nonverbal behavior*. Over the years, I’ve developed my own communication habits in a variety of situations. I may speak loudly or softly. I may have or not have eye contact with you. I may frown or grimace. I may speak hesitatingly. I may mumble. And so on.



And, to make it still more complicated, I need to be aware of the fact that the meanings I have associated with the words I use in my communication may not be the same as those which you associate with your words. You have your own collection of word meanings and your own expectations in listening to me. You may hear my words and interpret my nonverbal behaviors very differently than I do.

So, as you can see from all of the above, communication is very complicated.

**Be Very Aware Of Your Uniqueness And Your State Of Mind When You Speak
BE SELF-AWARE!**