LESSON-27

FACTORS IMPEEDING UNDERSTANDING IN PUBLIC SPEAKING SITUATIONS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

A study of Campbell reveals the following *sources* of systematic errors which impede understanding:

(1) *Length of the Message:* The length of the message would result either in loss or retaining of message. Necessarily, the listeners tend to shorten, simplify and eliminate the details of what they listen to a message. Consequently, it may produce a loss of information and accuracy. The longer the message, the greater the loss.

(2) *Middle of the Message:* Listeners tend to be the best/the first or last part of the message. Usually, the middle of the message is least remembered.

(3) *Round off:* Listeners are good tailors who frequently tend to tailor messages according to their own need, requirement or beliefs. Listeners tend to make message perception. The systematic error of round off as a message often distorts the true content and meaning of the message.

(4) *Fast Haunting Imperfectly Transmitted Messages:* Generally listeners will perceive all unclear or ambiguous messages either in terms of positiveness or negativeness. If the message has positive things in the past, it will also be perceived to be positive. If the source has said usually negatively on the topic, the message will be judged negative as well.

(5) *Reductive Nature of Listening:* As observed in the above point, the past message affects listeners' perception in the positiveness or negativeness. So they allow previously expressed ideas to color their interpretations. Once listeners heard what the speaker has had to say before, they know what the speaker says now. Thus they are now in reductive nature of listening or simply does not listen.

(6) Hearing What One Expects to Hear: Listeners always tend to hear what they expect to bear. In this situation, the listeners rather than ceasing to listen, continue listening, but this error distorts the message received.

(7) *You Agree With Me:* The listeners, particularly when confronted with an admired or repeated source, often modifies the message so that it more closely coincides with her or his attitudes or beliefs.

(8) *Black and White Listening:* The listeners in the process of listening tend to polarize the words, seeing things as either good or bad, right or wrong, 'beautiful' or ugly, and to evaluate the message in terms of these extremes.

(9) *Filtered Listening:* "Often we tend to filter the message through the attitudes held by the groups with which we identify. We let the group members tell us what to think or how to interpret the message rather than relying first upon our intelligence.

Barriers to Communication in a Public Speaking Situation

Once your content message is complete and you have the draft of "what" you want to say, its time to put your message into language your audience can understand. By eliminating the common pitfalls below, you can ensure your audience understands your message.

Pretentiousness

Remember that as a presenter it is your job to inform, not to impress! Avoid creating communication barriers by using formal or "big" words. These inflated words often make you appear less credible than you may well be. Remember, keeping it simple is usually the best approach.

1. Emulate
2. Imitate
3. Inculcate
4. Teach
5. Valiant
6. Brave
7. Triteness

In order to create the greatest impact for your message, avoid cliches and other trite phrases. Use words that express your ideas without relying on other's expressions to communicate your message. Your message is most powerful when it's in your own words.

1. Life is what you make it
2. There are two sides to every question
3. The crack of dawn
4. Tower of strength

Jargon

Before you use any type of corporate or cultural jargon, make sure you understand your audience. If you can, avoid using jargon altogether. The easiest way to lose an audience is to throw around words that mean nothing.

CSR Customer Service Representative

VAR Value Added Reseller
SME Subject Matter Expert
ISP Internet Service Provider

Tip
If you plan to use words your audience may not understand, define each one when you first use it in your presentation. You may also want to create a handout of terms for your audience to use as a reference.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

(1) *Audience:* The communicator should know his audience and accordingly to put ideas across. If the audience or listeners are not able to understand, it is an ineffective communication.

(2) *Ideas:* The transmitter should have Clear information to be commu-nicated. One must be clear about ideas, opinions, facts to be communicated. Other wise he cannot make them the ideas clear.

(3) *Ambiguity:* Using words in current use is important and to avoid words which convey vague meaning. A vague communication gives way to confusion in communication.

(4) *Conditions:* Necessary physical conditions, facilities and environment are to be provided to both the speaker and the listeners.

(5) *Not to Talk and Talk:* Speak only that much sufficient to convey the central idea of the subject matter. A verbal communication should be short, clear and simple to pass message.

(6) *Gestures and Tone:* The style in which the message is conveyed is as important as what is being said. There must be integration between facial expression, voice, gestures, mood to the action of what is said about.

(7) *Not to Talk, to Impress:* The purpose of communication is not to impress but to express, to inspire confidence and make them understand. Expressing and conveying a better message creates an impression. It is not communication if the speaker tries to conceal, intimidate and to impress.

(8) *Feedback:* Feedback is probably the most important method of improving communication. Two-way process ensures feedback. The communicator has to obtain feedback from the receiver.

(9) *Emphasis on Purpose:* The subject matter and its theme should be greatly emphasized to draw the attention of the listener.

(10) *A void Extremes:* Some subject matters are too good or too bad. It is desirable to avoid extremes in speaking.

(11) *Cultivate Speaking:* Listening is different from hearing. Listening and understanding require a lot of reasoning and attitude. The reasons of non--listening are boredom, bias, fear, interruption, etc.

(12) *Clarify Ideas:* The communicator first has to clarify his ideas himself before; think on the message clearly and clarify ideas to ensure effective communication.

(13) *Purpose:* The purpose of communication" is to make others under-stand the subject matter. The communication is ineffective if the purpose is not achieved.

(14) *Physical and Human Setting:* An atmosphere of mutual trust is to be created in the process of communication. It is mainly the responsibility of the superiors. The informal relations is the best weapon 'to promote physical and human setting in the organization.

On the Job
SOLVING A COMMUNICATION
DILEMMA AT MATTEL

Convincing the world that Barbie is more than just a bimbo is not an easy task, but Jill Barad is doing her best with careful planning and a thorough understanding of her audience. Part of Barad's problem is that Mattel's purposes are mixed. On the one hand, the company wants Barbie to be a worthy role model for little girls. On the other hand, MatteI wants to sell dolls and acces-sories-and that means that Barbie must retain her traditional appeal. After all, hundreds of millions of people have voted with their

pocketbooks for the Barbie doll whose number one priority is what to wear. Nearly $2 billion in yearly sales-40 percent of MatteI's total revenue-is at stake. Barad knows that completely changing Barbie's image could jeopardize the doll's mystique and hurt sales.

To a great extent, that mystique depends on Barbie's lack of a strong identity. Mattel intentionally says very little about Barbie's character because they want little girls to decide what Barbie is like. Her bland personality and her wide assortment of clothes and ac-cessories allow for endless possibilities. Barbie can be whatever a child wants her to be.

Still, an image of Barbie emerges from a variety of messages advertising, public relations events, the official Barbie Web site, and *Barbie* magazine, a glossy publication sent to 650,000 mem-bers of Barbie's fan club. The magazine describes Barbie's clothes and activities. In a recent issue, for example, Ken took Barbie out to dinner at a "sumptuous restaurant: For the occasion, Barbie chose her "ravishing new pink ruffled evening dress." Perhaps the strongest statement about Barbie's personality was a two-hour car-toon special, featuring her experiences with her all-girl rock band. But even there, Barbie's character remained a mystery. All she did on the show was sing and play music.

Although in many ways Mattel has reinforced the popular im-age of Barbie, the company has raised her consciousness. In the mid-1970s, the company surveyed mothers and asked their opin-ion of Barbie. Many responded that she lacked ambition and should get a job. According to Jill Barad, the public was delighted when MatteI reacted by launching Barbie's career. Now Barbie is a better person, says Barad, who comments that Barbie "does have talent and skills, and goes to work and makes money, and that's how she affords her car!" She has also embraced cultural diversity. Barbie's pals are African American, Asian, and Hispanic, and there are African American and Hispanic versions of Barbie herself.

Mattel is also winning points for Barbie by emphasizing the doll's therapeutic value. Children's Hospital in Los Angeles uses Barbie to help youngsters who are going through an amputation. The hospital staff removes Barbie's arm or leg, fits her with an artificial limb, and gives her to the child as a gift. Ellen Zaman, direc-tor of patient family services, notes, "It helps the children under-stand what will happen to them."

As a symbol of popular culture, Barbie has also gained a mea-sure of respectability. Scholars write learned articles analyzing her significance. The Toy Manufacturers of America have acknowl-edged her unique place in the history of toys. The Smithsonian In-stitution sponsored a special Barbie exhibit. For her thirtieth birth-day, a crowd of toy manufacturers, collectors, and fans assembled at Lincoln Center to pay tribute to America's number one doll. Needless to say, Barbie wowed them in her rose gown, her pink feather boa, and her lavish earrings.

Your Mission:
You have recently joined Mattel's marketing de-partment. One of your responsibilities is to respond to letters about Barbie. Your goals are to emphasize Barbie's positive quali-

ties, to reinforce her popularity with youngsters, and to handle her critics as diplomatically as possible. Choose the best alternatives for handling the following correspondence, and be prepared to ex-plain why your choice is best:

You have received a letter from Alice Brown, a reporter for *Ms* magazine, who is writing an article tentatively entitled "Barbie: Reflection or Molder of Contemporary Values?" Brown has asked you for information about the marketing campaign that Mattel has employed to mold Barbie's image over the years. When responding to Brown's request, what should your pur-pose be?

a. The general purpose is to inform. The specific purpose is to provide Brown with a brief summary of the evolution of Mat-tel's marketing campaign for Barbie over the past 30 years.

b. The general purpose is to persuade. The specific purpose is to convince Brown that Barbie is a worthy role model for young girls and that the marketing campaign portrays Bar-bie as a socially aware, successful career woman.

c. The general purpose is to collaborate. The specific purpose is to work with Brown to develop an article that examines the evolution of MatteI's marketing campaign for Barbie.

d. The general purpose is to respond. The specific purpose is to convey details requested by a journalist.

2. Assume that your purpose is to convince Brown of Barbie's worthiness as a role model who is a socially aware, successful ca-reer woman. Does this purpose meet the tests suggested in the chapter?

a. Yes. The purpose is realistic. The timing is right. You are the right person to send the message. And the purpose is accept-able to the organization.

b. Not completely. Realistically, Brown may not accept Barbie as an admirable role model for young girls. Even though Barbie now has a career and some friends from other cul-tural backgrounds, her basic image has not changed a great deal.

c. The purpose is fine, but you are not the right person to send the message. MatteI's president should respond.

d. The timing is right for this message. Stress Barbie's involvement in social causes and in career activities. Show how unimportant fashion is to Barbie's new lifestyle.

3. When planning your reply, what assumptions can you safely make about your audience?

a. The audience includes not only Alice Brown but also the readers of *Ms.* magazine. Given their feminist bias, the read-ers will probably be hostile to business in general and to Bar-bie in particular. They probably know virtually nothing about the toy business. Furthermore, they probably mistrust you because you are a Mattel employee.

b. Alice Brown will probably be the only person who reads the letter directly. She is the primary audience; the readers of her article are the secondary audience. Brown will be happy to hear from MatteI and will read the information with an open mind. As a journalist, Brown is probably in-telligent and objective. However, she may not know a great deal about Mattel or about marketing. Although she is a stranger to you, she trusts your credibility as a MatteI spokesperson.

c. Alice Brown is probably the sole and primary audience for the letter. The fact that she is writing an article about Barbie suggests that she enjoyed playing with the doll as a child and that she knows a great deal about Barbie already. In all like-lihood, she will respond positively to your reply and will trust your credibility as a MatteI representative.

d. Alice Brown may be an industrial spy working for a rival toy company. She will show your reply to people who work for your competitor; they will analyze the information and use it to improve their own marketing program at your expense.

4. Which channel and medium of communication should you use in replying to Alice Brown?

a. Call her- on the phone to ask for clarification of her needs; then follow up with a letter report (4 to 20 pages, written in letter format).

b. Call her on the phone, ask for clarification of her needs, and answer her while you have her on the line.

c. Write a letter asking for clarification of her needs, and follow up with a letter report.

d. Send a form letter used for replying to all inquiries about Barbie.

Communication Load

The importance of message load or information load cannot be over emphasized and needs no elucidation. The value of the subject matter to be handled is called 'communication load.' In other words, message load means the quantity and the complexity of the message received by the receiver. In communication between an individual or an authority relationship who are expected to handle the message in flow so that the work can be accomplished. In a formal organization, message flow is to be handled to achieve the objectives to be achieved, the message flows through different channels to the appropriate users and time. Communication load is also one of the basic barriers to effective communication.

Message load may be underload or overload. Message which is too little is called as underload of message. The word "underload of message" may be defined as the amount of information load which is less than the handling ability of the receiver. On the other hand, "overload of the message" means the amount of information load which exceeds the handling ability of the receiver.

Both underload and overload are barriers to communication. The underload of message means the people get bored, without work involvement, resulting in gossip, rumors, chit-chat, underuse of channels, irregular relationship etc., unproductive to the organization. Optimum load of message flow, formally prescribed is good for the organizational growth which is right load for the communication system. On the other hand, it is difficult to prescribe the correct message load.

The following factors affect a high volume of messages, according to M.T. Myers and G.E.Myers.

I. High structure of communication network will create too much information.
2. When more sub-systems are linked to the major systems, it is the span of management.
3. Organizational rules about who communicates with whom.
4.The incidence of ambiguous orders and questions.
5. The extent of expertness among those attempting to develop mes-sages.
6. The speed with which changes are taking place within the organization.
7. Rapidity of change and organizational sensitivity to change by the outside environment.
8. The availability of hardware and software to store and process information.26

A rapid increase in message load is a costly matter because an organization may have-to create additional systems and personnel to handle the message load. Sometimes it may be necessary to replace personnel or re-organize the sub-systems to cope with the overload.
Regarding responses to overload from the personnel, the study of J.C. Miller in "Information Input Overload and Psychopathology," indicates the following:
1. *Omission:* Omission of some of the messages which they consider inconsequential or less important, when they think that messages are not needed.
2. *Committing Errors:* Committing errors of transmission of message. Errors in the process may take place when handling an overload message.
3. *Approximation;* It means giving partial answers to questions. It may take the form of giving stock replies to questions.
4. *Queuing:* It implies delaying processing of messages during the peak- periods. -
5. *Escaping:* Escaping may be a psychological or physical response.
6. *Multiple Channels:* Response to overload is the result of formation of many channels, when the overload is only taking place in a part of the system.
7. *Filtering:* Filtering is the process of selecting messages on a priority basis.

The responses of the topmost level communication intermediaries and its analysis to system message overload has revealed some interesting features. The results are contained in the report of A. Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* of a Rand Corporation study.

The following are the responses and predicted reactions in bureaus;

I. "Slowdown or message handling without changing the network structure or rules of transmission." This, writes Downs, is the most common response to overloads because:

(a) Until it is. known whether or not the situation is temporary or permanent, the best response is to do as little as possible;
(b) Overload often occurs because of the peaks or crisis, so it is best to respond by delaying reactions; and
(c) Economy in the bureau may be more important than the fast processing of messages, so no changes in message handling are   called for.

2. Change rules so that the lower echelons screen out more information or have different "thresholds" of message importance.
3. Add more levels and channels to the existing network.
4. Group the message.
5. Improving the message.27

On the Job
FACING A COMMUNICATION DILEMMA
AT ROCKPORT

Convening an Unconventional Meeting
Calling a meeting isn't unusual; executives do it every day. Even *so,* few executives shut down entire companies to bring everyone to a meeting, but that's exactly what Rockport president John Thorbeck decided to do. Rockport is a footwear subsidiary of Reebok, and except for the handful of people left behind to answer telephones in the company's Marlboro, Massachusetts, headquarters, all 350 managers and employees were asked to gather in a huge room for a two-day meeting.

Many of Thorbeck's top managers questioned the need for halting the daily functions that had built Rockport's annual sales to $300 million. The chief financial officer com-plained that "a company as large as ours can't afford to lose two whole shipping days!' He also doubted that the discussions would yield any concrete results. But Thorbeck believed this meeting was important enough to involve every employee at every level. His objective was nothing less than to increase the company's potential. "I felt that there was so much more we could do, given our profitability and resources;' he said. "Our goals were far too modest."

If you were John Thorbeck, how would you use a two-day meeting to elicit input from your employees? What factors of oral communication would you use to get them talking? Would good listening skills be valuable? What would you do to be sure the meeting was productive?