

Communication

Communication skills means an ability to reach aims through communication. What are these possible aims and how can we reach them?



In the most general case, communication is exchange of information, where a party receives and shares something. Based on these two elements, two general types of aims can be proposed: 1) when receiving information – to learn, 2) when sharing information – to cause the desired effect in the recipient (e.g. some action, change of opinion etc).

How to reach these aims:

1. **Learn** (by perceiving)



If someone wants to learn from the received messages, there is no deficiency of advice about that: tons of books. But only **'if'**. 'If' is the biggest obstacle. If you want to listen (see) and understand, you will learn how to ask additional questions, how to distinguish different lingual signs (words, phrases), non-lingual signs (e.g. facial expressions, gestures, other signs of non-verbal communication), how to take into account a narrow and broad context, how to figure out probable motives of the counterpart, how to notice their biases and cultural traits that may influence their messages... It is not enough to be merely present and silent when someone else speaks. In extreme situations, listening and understanding can require very intense work.

Sometimes understanding a message takes several days – it may be wise not to react to an important and/or complex message immediately but to agree with the other party that you will take some time to analyse the information and prepare a response.

2. **Influence** (by speaking)

How can we influence others, still respecting their freedom? We can share some information and, if the recipient does not mind, our advice or opinion.



A typical problem here is lack of interest from the recipient. A most general solution is to show a relevant problem to them. Then the recipient may get interested in solving it. For this aim, they may also need your advice or opinion.

How to show a problem to an uninterested person? One way is to **ask them a question** pointing to that problem. People are usually more interested in talking themselves than in listening. Asking them a question gives them a possibility to do what they prefer (talking) yet directs their attention to a problem in the question.

For example, if A is vegan and B wants A to discover the benefits of the diet that includes meat, B can ask A one or several questions leading to the point, for example: Why do you think that vegan diet is best? If plants are also live, why is it moral to eat them and not animals? Are you aware of any risks for health linked to the vegan diet? What do you think about vitamins of B group? etc.

One benefit of asking questions compared to telling something is that the recipient may discover the point themselves and is likely to have higher trust in his own discovery than in the information from an external source.

P.S.

Since communication is realized by different means, verbal and non-verbal, it is useful to master them as well. For example, *linguistic skills* (a very, very big field), *semiotics* (study of signs), *psychology*, *cultural studies* etc. General *problem-solving skills* and *Aristotelian logic* are also helpful since communicators often need the ability to analyse the obtained information and construct their own messages in clear and consistent ways.