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1 HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEOPLE HAS BEEN a principal problem throughout recorded history. It is complicated further when translation is involved.

Many years ago this country had some diplomatic problems which resulted in riots and general civil disturbances. Just when it appeared that agreement had been reached between Panama, the Canal Zone, and the United States, diplomatic relations came apart because the parties differed as to the meaning of a single word. In the English language text, the two parties agreed to “discuss” differences.

The Spanish language text used the word *negociar*—“to negotiate.” Americans assumed that negotiation meant (according to *Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*) “a conference or discussion designed to produce an agreement.” They felt this was synonymous with “discussion.” Panamanians thought that “to negotiate” implied a willingness to *renegotiate* existing treaties. It took months, patience, and the services of communications experts to bring about the ultimate understanding.

In another instance, the realization that the question of war or peace could depend upon effective communication brought about the establishment of the hotline between the world’s nuclear capitals at the time, Washington and Moscow, to avoid an inadvertent pushing of the panic button.

We have a communication problem as we wage war against the

powers of the adversary and strive to help members of the Church to live by gospel principles. I suppose we can take some courage from the fact that the Master had His problems with communication, even though He possessed great understanding of people.

On one occasion Jesus was speaking from a ship to a great multitude gathered on the shore. In the course of His remarks, He related the parable of the sower.¹ When He finished, the disciples asked Him, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”²

And then He said the ears of these particular people were dull of hearing and their eyes were closed. “But blessed are your eyes,” the Savior told His disciples, “for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”³ He then continued His sermon, relating several other parables.

Perhaps the disciples were too embarrassed to interrupt again because Jesus had told them it was given to them to understand the



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Sower*. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.

mysteries of heaven. But when the multitude had gone, “his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable.”⁴

If the Master found it necessary to repeat and explain in order to have effective communication, I suppose we should not feel discouraged when we fail to communicate effectively at the first recitation.

Effective communication is essential to effective motivation. The leader must first educate himself, develop enthusiasm, and perfect himself in the skill he desires to teach (communicate). He must then project his feeling on the subject until it is shared by the follower. This is the process of most effective motivation.

Effective communication always includes these three Cs: *clear*, *concise*, and *confirm*.

CLEAR

One must make his presentation *clear*. The first rule of clarity is to have a well-defined goal or objective—to know what you wish to accomplish through your communication. Unless you can define this goal clearly to yourself, it is not likely your audience will understand it and be motivated.

Another way in which clarity can be improved is by use of illustrations. Since words have different meanings to various people, the additional definition through supporting illustrations is usually helpful. There are many types of illustrations.

First, words and motions. Jesus made *parables* a part of nearly every teaching situation. So often did He use this teaching device that Evangelists recorded at one point that “without a parable spake he not unto them.”⁵ Jesus said He used parables in teaching because they conveyed to the hearer religious truth exactly in proportion to the hearer’s faith and intelligence. To the unlearned, the parable had story interest and some teaching value. To the spiritual, it conveyed much more, including the mysteries or secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Thus the parable is suited alike to simple and learned. It teaches all people to find divine truth in common things.

For the purpose of teaching in our day, the Savior’s parables have the added advantage of taking on more and more meaning as we understand

more about the objects and symbols He used in his parables. These stories also can be suited to a variety of applications.

Closely related to parables are the *brief comparisons* the Master often used to illustrate ideas, such as: “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.”⁶ “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”⁷ “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”⁸ “By their fruits ye shall know them.”⁹

Illustrative stories provide another excellent means of teaching to aid clarity. It is easy for people to project themselves into stories of living people and their experiences. The Lord frequently used this technique. In the case of the widow’s mite, He illustrated a lesson in charity: “This poor widow hath cast in more than they all: for these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.”¹⁰ Real stories involving real people provide an excellent vehicle to promote clarity.

A third type of illustration involving words and motions is the *demonstration*. This is particularly helpful when attempting to teach skills that have some mechanical aspects. Examples of situations in which demonstrations could profitably be used include teaching techniques in public speaking, methods of conducting oral evaluations and interviews, effective use of visual aids, and athletic skills. Pictures can be used. The old adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words” can be supported by many examples.

Objects provide another means of clarifying a message. These might be objects from surroundings or from apparel—objects prepared by the speaker for the occasion. Some examples of utilizing objects from surroundings might be (1) using organ pipes to illustrate how priesthood power works *through* the individual when he is in tune or (2) using a light switch to demonstrate the need to take a voluntary action (turn on the switch) yourself in order to get light (as from the Lord).

CONCISE

Next is *concise*. Make your presentation concise. To be concise means to express much in few words. The amount of time spent in

communicating an idea may vary depending on the complexity of the subject matter and the previous knowledge of members of the audience. But communication is improved when each word, each sentence, each paragraph is meaningful and pertinent to the objective.

Guidelines for making a concise presentation could include (1) study and research until you know you have information that is worthy of presentation; (2) write your thoughts on paper as they come, without concern for style or polish; (3) arrange ideas in logical order.

Some prefer a formula for organizing material into a logical sequence, such as PREP—*point, reason, example, point*. The name of a well-known opera has been used as a letter key to a motivation formula. AIDA in this instance stands for gain *attention*, sustain *interest*, incite *desire*, get *action*.

Eliminate irrelevant ideas, illustrations, and humor which reaches too far for an application. Because of the difficulty of getting full attention, there is a temptation with some to include interesting material even though it is not entirely relevant. When the organizing stage has been completed, reduce every sentence to the fewest necessary words. Last, learn the material well enough to present it as it has been prepared.

CONFIRM

Finally comes *confirm*. To see what has been learned, confirm what you have taught. Fragmentary listening, misinterpretation of ideas, and mistaken meanings of words may cause misunderstandings. It is important, therefore, to have a method of checkup, feedback, and correction of mistaken impressions whenever possible. One labor negotiator found a very effective way to cool down heated arguments and improve communication in labor and management disputes. The referee made a rule that the representative of labor could not present his viewpoint until he could explain management's viewpoint to the satisfaction of the management representative, and vice versa.

Here are two of the methods that have been used successfully to improve communication skills: (1) *Improve your vocabulary* by keeping a dictionary available when reading or writing. Check words about which you have a question to see if your understanding of their meaning is the same as the dictionary definition. The listening vocabulary should

be greater than the one you use to speak or write so you can learn on a higher level than that on which you speak or write. (2) *Read aloud* as a drill when the opportunity to do so presents itself. This strengthens the voice and makes it more clear. It helps the reader to enunciate words more clearly, carefully, and naturally. It helps to prevent speech mannerisms and monotonous patterns because the reader has an opportunity to use other people's word combinations. The reader should also practice voice inflection and develop a wider range of tones to make the voice more interesting.

The Lord, through His prophets, has given counsel concerning the importance of communication skills. He has also emphasized the need of spirituality as a part of effective communication. When Moses was called to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, he recognized his weakness as a speaker—a communicator. Nevertheless, he had the Spirit of the Lord with him. The Lord, after some reassuring, gave him Aaron as a mouthpiece. He didn't give Aaron the job of leading but assigned that to Moses, who had the other leadership skills that were necessary to perform the task.¹¹

Paul counsels that we should seek spiritual gifts so that we might speak unto men “to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” He then counsels that clarity is even more important than the gift of tongues. “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” Who shall be motivated? “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.”¹²

When we let the Lord be our guide in developing communication skills, He can help us to be humble, to present ourselves to the right people at the proper time and in an atmosphere where we will be trusted and worthy of a listening ear. When communication skills are accompanied by spirituality, the Lord can work through His servants to accomplish His purposes. Hundreds of thousands of newly baptized members of the Church and the many missionaries who taught them the gospel provide a living testimony of effective communication.

One spring day, a humble boy, motivated by a sincere desire to know the truth, sought an audience with his Heavenly Father. The glorious

vision which followed, the words from the Father, “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear him!*”¹³ the message from the Master, and the response of faithful service and supreme sacrifice by that boy, even Joseph Smith, were communication at its finest.

As we ourselves prepare to communicate effectively, may this beautiful example govern our thinking and prompt our actions.

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NOTES

1. See Matthew 13:1–43.
2. Matthew 13:10–11.
3. Matthew 13:16.
4. Matthew 13:36.
5. Mark 4:34.
6. 1 Nephi 4:13.
7. Matthew 4:19.
8. Matthew 5:16.
9. Matthew 7:20.
10. Luke 21:3–4.
11. See Exodus 4:10–16.
12. 1 Corinthians 14:3, 8–9.
13. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.