

SECOND EDITION

CREATING COMPETENT COMMUNICATION

DONALD D. YODER • LAWRENCE HUGENBERG • SAMUEL P. WALLACE



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Donald D. Yoder
University of Dayton

Samuel P. Wallace
University of Dayton

Lawrence W. Hugenberg
Youngstown State University



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DEDICATION

To Boo: I cannot do without your smile and touch. Thanks for being my friend.
—L.H.

To my mother and family who have always given me unconditional support.
—D.Y.

To Sweetie Lumps and my children.
—S.W.

P R E F A C E

This text is written for beginning students who want to learn skills and strategies for creating competent communication. The text is designed to be used in a hybrid or blend basic communication course that combines theoretical understanding of communication processes with pragmatic applications of communication skills. Both novice and experienced teachers can use this text which is accompanied by a thorough and complete instructor's manual.

Creating Competent Communication develops three fundamental themes. First, communication is a transactional process in which people mutually and simultaneously cooperate to create shared meanings. Second, communication situations are more alike than different. Third, communication skills differ from communication strategies.

Most texts approach communication from the perspective of the sender (Action approach) or the receiver (Reaction approach). These perspectives focus on the individual's behaviors as people attempt to encode and decode messages. Individuals who understand communication processes and skillfully send or receive messages are considered to be competent communicators.

The Transaction approach adopted by this text, however, maintains that communication is simultaneously created by all participants. Since both people cooperate to create shared meanings, competence cannot be judged by one individual's actions. Therefore, this text discusses communication competence as occurring through the collective actions of both people. From this perspective, a person cannot be competent alone, that is, there is no such thing as a competent communicator. Rather, communication can be more or less competent depending on the communicators' collective behaviors. The focus changes, therefore, from what one person does to create a message, to what both persons do to help each other create shared meanings.

A second theme is that communication situations are more alike than different. Public speaking, group discussions, interviews, and interpersonal relationships are often approached with the assumption that these contexts are different in the kinds of communication skills required and the nature of the communication processes involved. To assume that contexts are inherently different also presupposes that skills learned in one context are not transferable to others. From this perspective, for example, people would have to learn different skills for interpersonal communication than they would use for public speaking. Similarly, skills used for presenting information in a group discussion are to be forgotten or ignored when communicating interpersonally. Such an assumption is not true.

All face-to-face communication contexts are composed of the same characteristics, require similar skills, and involve the same principles and processes of communication, whether the context is stereotyped as public speaking, group discussion, interview, or interpersonal. Indeed, it is often difficult even to label a specific context as public speaking or group communication or any other context. Each communication context includes the same variables which differ only in the degree to which they influence communication. All contexts require organized messages, though the degree to which a message is organized may be different. All contexts require a number of people, though the specific number of people may vary. All communication requires skills for encoding and decoding messages, though the specific

manner in which people speak and listen may change. Each context, therefore, is defined by a unique combination of characteristics present at specific levels. The focus is on determining the influence of the characteristics present and adapting communication strategies accordingly.

Third, we maintain that communication skills differ from communication strategies. Communication skills are the specific behavioral responses of an individual in a communication situation. Communication strategies are the planned manipulation of skills to achieve a specific communication purpose. Analogously, a football player may learn various skills for blocking an opponent, but planning whom to block and how to block to achieve a specific goal is a strategy. Similarly, a communicator can learn skills for different ways to organize a message, or various listening skills, or several techniques for creating a verbal message. The specific organizational pattern the communicator chooses, the specific listening skills the communicator uses, or the specific verbal message the communicator creates is a strategic decision.

In summary, the Transaction approach to communication focuses on how people cooperate to achieve competent communication. Because communication contexts are more alike than different, communication skills transcend the specific context. To adapt to the specific characteristics of a particular communication context, communicators must use their skills to create communication strategies that help them help each other to mutually create shared meanings.

Plan of the Text

In light of our three fundamental assumptions, Unit One focuses on communication processes and principles that are characteristic of all face-to-face communication. Unit Two teaches specific communication skills that apply to all contexts. Units Three and Four adapt these skills to create specific strategies for a variety of face-to-face communication situations.

Unit One discusses the three assumptions we make about communication. Specifically, the chapters explain the processes and principles of communication, the nature of communication competence, the processes of perception, the influence of self on communication, and the characteristics of communication situations.

Unit Two examines specific skills required for all communication situations. It presents skills for listening, adapting to the communication situation, and creating verbal and non-verbal messages. Unit II cites applications of skills to a variety of settings.

Unit Three discusses the nature and processes of communication in interpersonal relationships, interpersonal conflicts, group decision making, and interviews. These chapters demonstrate how to use communication skills learned in Unit Two to create specific strategies. Through these, communicators help each other create shared meanings and cooperatively achieve communication goals.

Unit Four examines the strategies for presenting information and persuading others in one-to-many, public speaking situations. These chapters apply the skills learned in Unit Two to create strategies to help others comprehend and remember information as well as to change attitudes and behavior.

The text also contains several pedagogical aids to help students learn the material. Chapter outlines and a glossary highlight important material and help students learn the concepts and skills. A unique pedagogical feature—“Before You Go On” Questions—help students summarize and comprehend material as they read each chapter. The answers to these questions serve as chapter summaries.

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U N I T O N E

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION

A course in communication can be the most important course you take. Your ability to communicate is essential to success in school, in your career, and in your personal and professional relationships. Communication is more than just common sense. Even though you have been communicating constantly throughout your life, you can improve your communication through study and practice. Knowing how communication works can increase your chances of creating competent communication.

Studying Unit One should convince you that the concepts discussed go beyond a common sense perspective. An understanding of this unit not only gives you a grasp of the process of communication, but it also helps you to comprehend the rest of the chapters.

This textbook is based on the concept of **communication competence** and treats communication as a transaction involving two or more people. Chapter One defines the transactional approach to communication by presenting a model and principles. Chapter Two defines the concept of communication competence and begins to outline steps to create and improve competence in communication. Chapter Three discusses the functions of perception and the effects of self-identity and self-esteem on your communication.

When you complete Unit One, you should understand that communication is a process that involves two or more people sending and receiving messages simultaneously. You should also understand that, just as it takes two people to communicate, it takes two people to create competent communication. Although you cannot be competent alone, you can cooperate with others to create competent communication.



C H A P T E R O N E

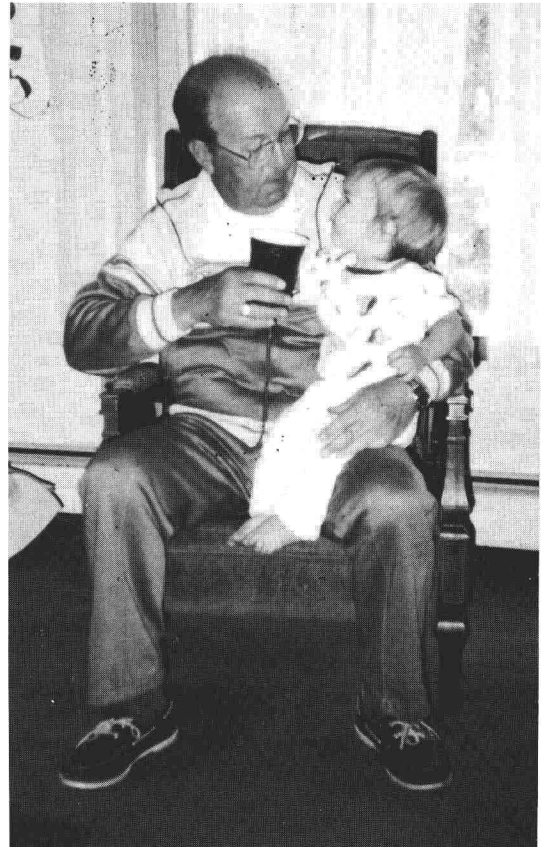
Understanding Communication

The Importance of Communication
Importance in Career Success
Importance in Interpersonal
Relationships

Approaches to Communication
The Action Approach
Action Model
Action Definition of Communication
The Reaction Approach
Reaction Model
Reaction Definition of
Communication
The Transaction Approach
Transaction Model
Transaction Definition of
Communication

Principles of the Transaction Approach to
Communication
Communication Is a Process
Communication Is Shared
Responsibility
Communication Has Both Content
and Relationship Messages
Communication Is Irreversible
Communication Is Personal

Responses to "Before You Go On" Questions:
A Chapter Summary



*"Conversation is an Art in Which Man has All Mankind for Competitors."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"I have been communicating all my life and have been doing pretty well all these years. Do I really need this course?"

"No one has ever told me that I need to communicate better."

"Studying communication courses is okay, but it's not as important as courses in my major."

As you review your communication experiences, you may believe you have all the communication skills you need. Usually, we conclude that we understand others and that they understand us. No one likes to admit that they have poor or ineffective communication skills. But, can you be sure you have the necessary communication skills to face an important interpersonal conversation with a supervisor at work? Or listen to a good friend needing your help? Or to talk with a group of your neighbors about an environmentally unsafe landfill in your community? Or to interview for a job you really want to get? All of these examples demand good communication skills. Will you be ready and able to handle these and similar communication situations?

The Importance of Communication

We spend most of our lives talking with and listening to others. Many people take for granted that they communicate well. Some people may even take a communication course to help them improve their communication. Others have not had a course in communication, but have practiced communication skills through trial and error. However, for most people the introductory course in communication is their *only* instruction in communication skills. Yet, we have all experienced, and will continue to experience difficulties communicating with others every day of our lives. Many of these difficulties could be minimized by learning and using appropriate communication skills and strategies. Every day we are involved in situations that demand good communication skills. We think the skills explored in this text will help you communicate effectively in your personal and professional lives.

Importance in Career Success

Soon you will begin interviewing for jobs in your chosen career. Researchers have discovered that well developed written and oral communication skills are among the most important skills that a person brings to a job and a career. The ability to communicate effectively will enhance your chance of advancement in any career (Willmington, 1989). Surveys of people in engineering, public relations, manufacturing, retail, sales, personnel, and almost any other career consistently find that communication is the most important skill in getting a job, doing the job well, and advancing in the career (Becker and Ekdom, 1980; Blitzstein, 1980; Mayer, 1982; Morse, 1991).

In discussing the importance of communication, DeFleur, *et al.* (1993) suggest, "The ability to communicate effectively has become more important to most people than manual skills required to produce things . . . The ability to communicate accurately and sensitively can make the difference between success and failure." One thousand personnel managers were asked to identify the top three skills they look for in prospective employees. The results of this research are summarized in the list below:

Top Skills Identified by Personnel Directors

1. Oral (speaking) Communication
2. Listening Abilities
3. Enthusiasm
4. Written Communication Skills
5. Technical Competence
6. Appearance
7. Poise
8. Work Experience
9. Resume
10. Specific Degree Held (Curtis, *et al.*, 1989).

Weitzel (1987) in *Careers for Speech Communication Graduates*, says that "Employers and employees place great emphasis on communication skills." A Vice-president for a large, multi-national steel company reported that communication skills are important for a prospective employee to *bring* to the job. She contended her company can teach new employees how to do their jobs; but they do not have the necessary personnel to teach these same employees how to communicate. Even with increasing dependence on computers and other technologies, Russell Rumberger concluded workers need "oral literacy, the ability to communicate, to work in teams and to shift rapidly as the work changed" (Flanigan, 1990). Whatever career you choose, good communication skills are necessary for you to succeed.

Importance in Interpersonal Relationships

Your interpersonal relationships with friends and family are important. You develop and maintain life-long friendships because of your ability to communicate with them. Think about one or two close relationships that are currently important to you. One of the bonds that keeps your relationship strong is the quality of your communication with the other person (Ford and Wolvin, 1993). We all need to have friends and intimate relationships. The skills and strategies discussed in this textbook could help you through a difficult situation with a spouse, a girlfriend or boyfriend, brothers or sisters or parents.

Every day of our lives, we are involved in interpersonal relationships that demand good communication skills (Hawken, Duran, and Kelly, 1991). In many instances, the communication is productive and satisfying. However, we also frequently experience some degree of difficulty communicating with others in relationships that are important to us. If you were asked to make a list of situations where the communication was not as clear or satisfying or productive as it could have been, you could easily come up with many specific instances. Ev-

Helen Wise, former President of the NEA, noted, "No college freshman can project 25 years to decide what he needs to learn—subject matter is easily forgotten and in today's world, the knowledge explosion makes constant learning an inevitability. But all adults today need to be able to communicate with clarity, to articulate ideas, to reason, to separate key facts from the barrage of ideas we all are exposed to everyday."



People need friends and intimate relationships.

everyone can. Our lists would certainly include one-to-one communication situations with friends and members of our families. It would also include group situations such as study groups for school, work groups on the job, social groups, or professional organizations. Frequently, we recognize that many communication situations are not successful, but do not know how to improve them. Instead we continue to communicate in nonproductive ways and to encounter communication difficulties in our relationships with others.

By learning and using appropriate communication skills and strategies, we could minimize these difficulties. The concepts, skills, and strategies we discuss in this book for preparing and communicating ideas will help you both personally and professionally.

There is always room to improve communication skills. Shonan Noronha (1987) highlights the benefits of effective communication in stating, "Those who are adept in communication arts can persuade their audiences to take desired courses of action or make certain decisions." Before learning specific communication

skills and strategies in the rest of this text, you must understand the nature of communication. This chapter discusses different perspectives of communication, defines communication, and shows how the communication process works.

Approaches to Communication

Communication is a complex process. Since it is constantly changing, it is difficult to determine how all of the elements operate and affect each other. One way to illustrate communication is to provide a model which contains the necessary components of the process and shows the relationships between them. Models help us describe the complex nature of the communication process and give us a way to analyze it. Accurately and completely describing a complex process which is constantly changing is not an easy task. The model acts as a blueprint of the process, showing the various elements which make up the communication event, how they fit together, and how they operate.

The way we picture the communication process, the way we think communication works, affects the way we communicate with others. There are three primary ways to describe communication. **Action models** approach the communication process from the message sender's point of view. **Reaction models** approach the communication process from the listener's point of view. The **Transaction model** we describe in this text approaches the communication process from the shared perspective of both the sender and the listener. Each model has a different use, yields a different insight into how communication functions, and provides a perspective from which to understand and improve our communication.

The Action Approach to Communication

An obvious part of communication is the process of sending messages. Some models of communication developed by speech communication professionals picture communication as a one-way or linear process (Shannon and Weaver, 1948). Figure 1.1 shows a sender sending a message to a listener, an elementary model of the **Action approach**.

Action Model. In the Action approach, a *sender* originates a message and tries to determine what to communicate and how best to communicate it to a *listener*. The *message* is the

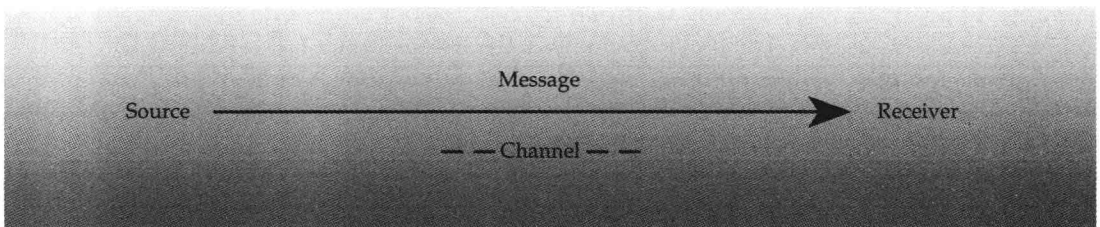


Figure 1.1. *An Action model of communication.*