

PATTERNS IN COMMUNICATION

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PATTERNS IN COMMUNICATION

A Guide to Speech
and Critical Listening

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To
L. M. H.

Never has training in speech been of greater importance than it is today. In today's world the spoken word, rather than the written word, is the most influential medium of communication.

In less than a hundred years, we have gone from Mr. Bell's first primitive telephone to Telstar and a worldwide space communication system whereby telephone conversations, television pictures, and other forms of telecommunication can be transmitted between continents. The technological problems have been largely solved. Now we must face the truly difficult problem: can we use these devices of instant communication to promote understanding and peace between men and nations, or will they simply speed us to destruction by making our antagonisms instantaneous and our discords lethal? A happy answer to that question will depend, in part, on whether we can learn to talk effectively and listen critically.

We cannot leave to chance the learning of such vital skills. The revolution in the means of communication is changing national politics and international diplomacy and is challenging the very foundations of our educational practices. The old foundations of education were necessarily based on reading and writing. The new foundations require equal attention to speaking and listening.

This book is based firmly on the belief that speech training should contribute to the health of a free society and to the full development of its citizens. It asserts the fundamental values of a free society: that persuasion is superior to force; that the methods of persuasion,

discussion, and debate are preferable to those of dictation and coercion; that the system of persuasion works only when all sides have equal opportunity to be heard and have spokesmen of approximately equal skill to defend their ideas. Based on these values, the purpose of this book may be simply stated. It is to help students speak and listen effectively, intelligently, and responsibly.

Skill in listening is, in a sense, more important than skill in speaking. Measurements of time spent in communication show that the average person spends about 45 percent of such time in listening and 30 percent in speaking. And listening, like speaking, requires training in techniques. Listening is not simply hearing. It is thinking about what is heard, understanding what is heard, and evaluating what is heard. This kind of listening is the other half of effective speaking and requires training in parallel techniques—how to speak to be heard, how to speak to be understood, how to speak to have one's ideas accepted.

This book, then, is concerned with the urgent need for more effective communicators. To communicate effectively means learning how to listen to—to think about, to understand, to evaluate—the great quantity of human voice communication made possible by modern technology. It means learning how to speak about what you have listened to, how to express your understanding and your evaluation. In short, it means participating effectively, intelligently, and responsibly in the discussion of human affairs.

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PROLOGUE

Speech in a Free Society

Communication is a funny business. There isn't as much of it going on as most people think.

JOHN M. CULKIN

We live in an age of communication. Never before has man been able to send his thoughts so far, so fast, or to such vast numbers of people. In the United States, we have fifty-four telephones for every 100 people. We own 85 million television sets and almost 300 million radios. This massive electronic system—which has even enabled us to sit in our living rooms and watch and listen as men walk and talk on the moon—is backed up by millions of words printed every day in books, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets.

It is surely strange that with so many ways of communicating open to us, John Culkin can still say that there



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Archie Bunker (Carroll O'Connor) typifies selective attention at work. Archie may hear views different from his own, but he either misinterprets them or ignores them.

isn't as much communication going on as we think. But if we reflect for a few minutes, we can understand what Mr. Culkin is saying to us. This may be the age of communication, but it is also the age of the communications gap. There are communications gaps between parents and youth, between governments and their people, between nations, between races.

The answer to this contradiction lies in the distinction between channels of communication—the many ways open to us for transmitting our ideas—and our actual success in communicating. Despite many technical aids to communication, we still too often fail to convey ideas carefully, accurately, and sensitively from one mind to another. What we have to learn Mr. Culkin puts this way: "Communication consists not in saying things but in having things heard."

This is a book about having things heard. Much of it will deal with what we can do as speakers to make sure that what we have to say is heard. Some of it will have to do with what we can do as listeners to be sure that we hear. But before we turn to these things in detail, let's take a look at some of the problems we face when we try to communicate with another person.

PROBLEMS IN MODERN COMMUNICATION

Selective Attention

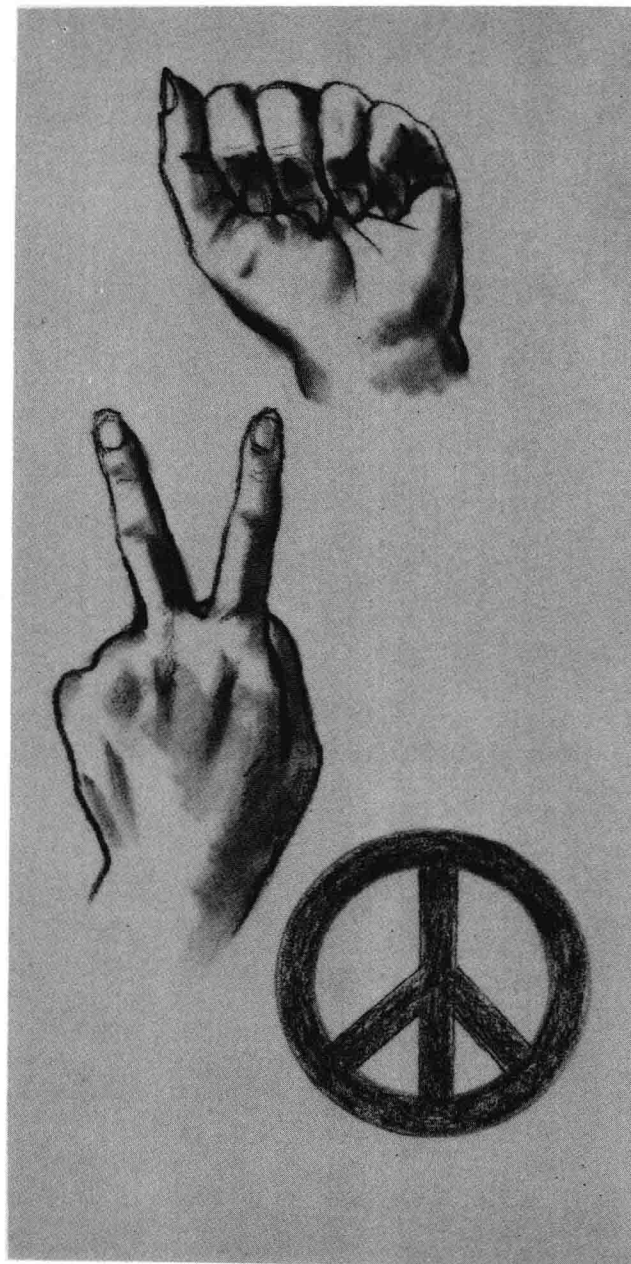
Selective attention is one of the more discouraging traits that researchers have come to recognize as they have explored the field of human communication. The term refers to the fact that we simply don't expose ourselves to all points of view. Instead we tend to listen to and read ideas with which we already agree.

Republicans read Republican papers and listen to Republican speakers; Democrats read Democratic papers and listen to Democratic speakers. Similarly laborers read and listen to the laborer's point of view, and businessmen read and listen to the businessman's point of view. What is more, when we do encounter ideas we don't like, we have a tendency to misinterpret the message to make it agree with our own notions. For instance, when strongly prejudiced people were shown cartoons exposing the foolishness of racial and religious prejudice, they interpreted them in an altogether different way. In another experiment, when smokers and non-smokers were shown evidence of a connection between cancer and smoking, more than half the nonsmokers saw the connection, but less than a third of the smokers did. We even tend to remember material that agrees with our own point of view and forget material that opposes it. Taken together, the failure to expose ourselves to different viewpoints, the willful misinterpretation, and the convenient lapses of memory comprise a formidable obstacle for a speaker to overcome.

Word Connotations

When we think of communication, we most often think of language, of words. It is just because we use words so naturally, so easily, that we often fail to see that the words we choose may actually get in the way of our efforts to communicate. Words, after all, are only symbols. They are signs that stand for ideas and things. The alphabetical symbols *d-o-g*, for example, can't bite, bark, or eat Alpo; but they can bring to mind a particular being that can do all these things.

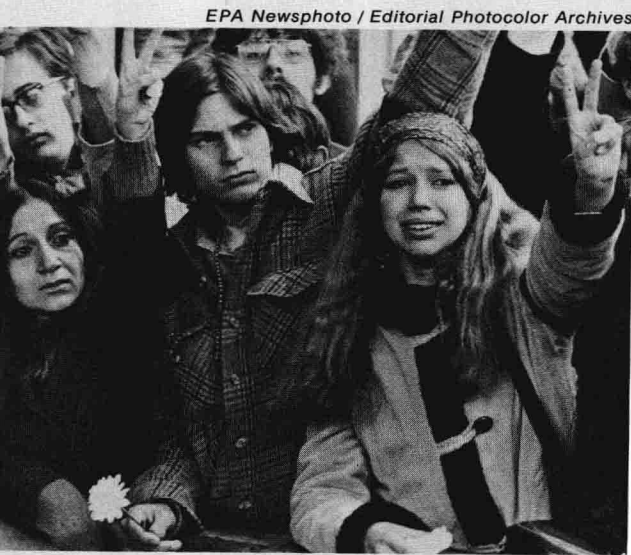
The problem is that the images words call up vary from one person to another and one group to another. The signs below can be used to illustrate this point. What they mean to a person depends on his familiarity with them and the feelings they arouse. The clenched





Wide World Photos

What these gestures mean depend on the viewer's personal experience and evaluation of the context in which the gestures appear. How does each situation change the symbol's connotation for you?



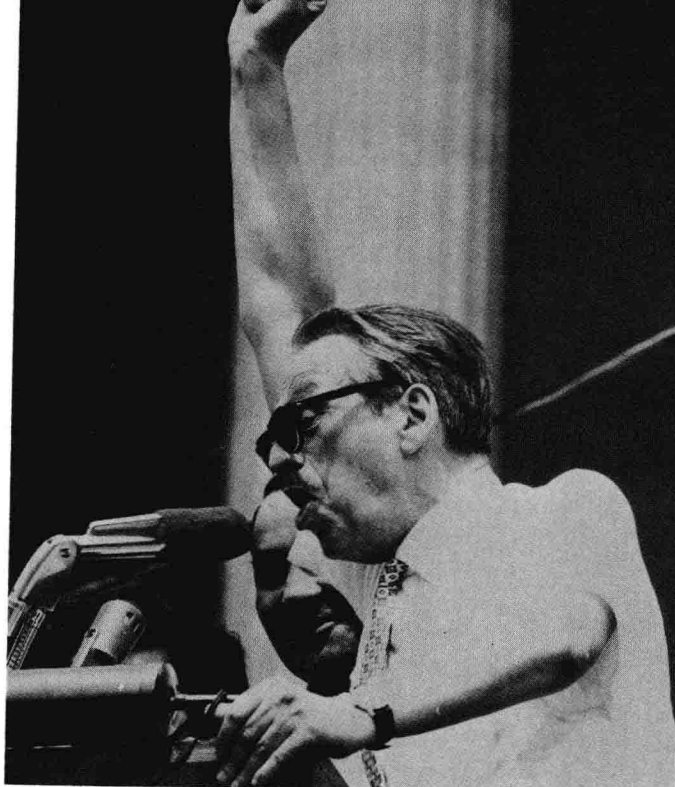
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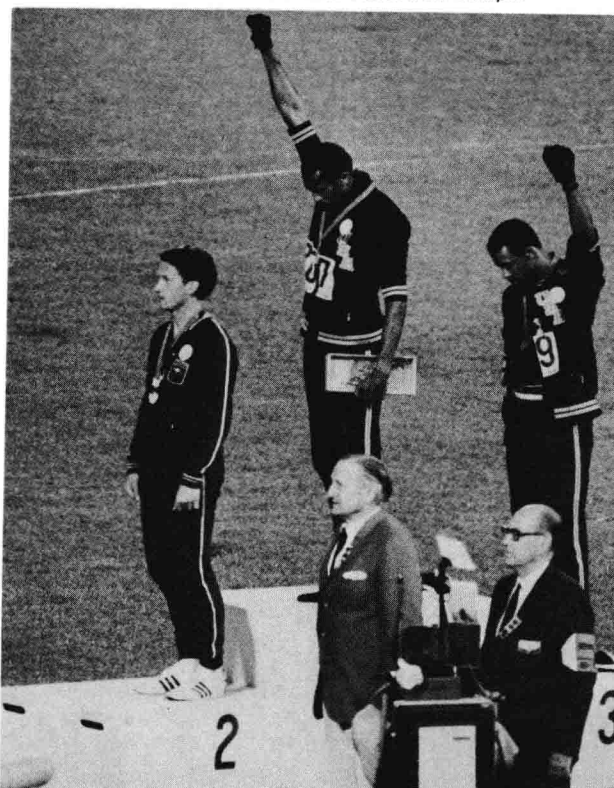
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The connotations of words depend on our experience. What feelings does "middle-aged 'bums'" arouse in this woman?

fist, for example, communicates determination and pride to some and the threat of violence to others. One group sees the peace symbol as standing for humanitarianism and justice, while to another it suggests hippies and "peace-niks" and arouses anger. To an older generation, two fingers raised in a V bring memories of Winston Churchill making his famous sign for victory during World War II; but to thousands of youthful or youth-oriented protesters it is a symbol of peace or, depending on the circumstances, of defiance.

What is true for signs is also true for words. What words communicate depends on how familiar they are to listeners and what emotional reaction they elicit. Speakers must therefore look to their listeners for the meanings of words as well as to the dictionary.

Nonverbal Communication

The study of speech concerns itself with both the speaker, the one who sends the message, and the listener, the one who receives it. We should recognize from the start, however, the element of oversimplification in these definitions; for while we tend to think of the listener as receiver and the speaker as sender, both in fact send and receive messages.

The listener usually doesn't use words to send his messages, for in our culture polite audiences do not talk back or heckle a speaker. The listener communicates by gesture and facial expression. The puzzled frown, the angry scowl, the glazed and indifferent eye, the nod of agreement, the smile of appreciation—all communicate to the alert speaker. What they communicate and how the speaker responds can make the crucial difference between success in getting a message across and failure.

The speaker himself makes use of similar nonverbal devices in conveying his messages. His words may be words of apology; but his eyes, face, and posture may all say, "I'm apologizing to you because you demand it."

Clearly then, what both speaker and listener do communicates as much as what they say, sometimes more. This sending and receiving of multiple messages complicates the process of communication and makes the roles of speaker and listener more difficult.



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Individual Viewpoint

How often have you heard a speaker or public personality described as someone who "tells it like it is"? The phrase seems to say that how it is is something known to the speaker and to the speaker alone—how it is to be black, to be drafted, to be young in an uncertain world. What this popular catch-all ignores is that how it differs in impor-



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You have been speaking for five minutes. Your audience is communicating with you. What are they saying?



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Each of these people has a personal view of an issue. How tolerant are they of each other's opinions? How could they try for better communication?

tant ways for each of the individuals who have shared a common experience. Ralph Abernathy, Claude Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, and Roy Wilkins have all had the experience of being black in a mostly white society; but while in some respects they have shared a common experience, each of them has seen different aspects of it and drawn different conclusions about what should be done. Which of them "tells it like it is"?

If some person knows how it *really* is, then clearly we should just listen to him tell us. But each of us has a view of the world peculiar to himself or herself; no one else's is quite the same. Inheritance, family, friends, neighborhood—all have had a part in shaping each of us into a truly unique human being. It is because life's experience is different for each of us that we should approach communication with curiosity and tolerance—curiosity to know the other person's experience and to learn from it, tolerance to understand that it will be different from our own and to expect that he will draw different conclusions from it.

As speakers we should be aware that however hard we have worked in preparation, however careful we have been to see that our facts are accurate, we are reporting from a particular and personal point of view. We should recognize that we do not have final truth and therefore be modest in our claims and tolerant of different views. As listeners we should recognize that we are listening to one person's view, to a report on some part of life's experience filtered through his mind and his personality. We should not expect anyone to tell it like it is except in the sense of telling it as he or she has experienced it.

SPEECH AND DEMOCRACY

How Speech Study Began

A little over twenty-four hundred years ago some of the people living along the Mediterranean Sea began to set up the first democracies ever known in the world. These people lived in city-states, each about the size of an American county. Previously they, like the rest of the world's people, had been ruled by one kind of dictator or another. Now they began to overthrow these dictators and rule themselves.

At once they discovered that self-rule was not possible without a system of speechmaking. For example, one citizen after another would come to his new government and say, "Ten years ago the dictator seized my land. It's my land, and I want it back." The dictator, of course, had destroyed all land titles. Such undocumented claims had to be

settled by juries. These first juries consisted of 100, 500, and even 1,000 men. There were no lawyers. Each citizen argued his own case. He had to stand before the assembled jury members and explain why the land he claimed really was his. To his dismay, he found that truth was not enough. He might tell the truth and his claim might be just, yet the jury would not believe or even understand him. Unhappily the man who gave the best speech too often got the land. As St. Augustine said many years later, "Who dare say that defenders of truth shall be unarmed against falsehood? While proponents of error know

This town meeting in Switzerland is the nearest modern equivalent of ancient Athenian democracy. Democracy thrives on the right of free speech.

Swiss National Tourist Office





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Nonprofessional speakers still have to capture and hold the attention of “juries” that have power over their day-to-day affairs. Here a citizen argues against a rate increase by the local public utilities commission.

how to win the audience’s good will, to capture attention and persuade them to listen with an open mind—shall the proponents of truth remain ignorant?” So these pioneers of democracy learned in the fifth century B.C.

When the citizens of the first democracies gathered to create new laws, they once again found that need and justice were not enough. Someone had to stand up and propose a new law. This person had to make the whole group—whether it consisted of 500 people or 5,000—hear him. This meant speaking above the noises drifting through the outdoor forum. It meant getting the attention of the audience and winning their good will. It meant stating the case for the law clearly and simply and answering questions skillfully.

At once, people in these early democracies were forced to study speechmaking. Within ten years of the found-

ing of the first democracy, the first speech textbook was published (on papyrus, of course, for there was as yet no paper and no printing press). The book was written by a man named Corax. He was the founder of the system of speechmaking, the first to lay down rules for effective speaking.

Thus democracy and the system of speechmaking were born together. They grew up together. Since that day, there has never been a successful self-government unless the leading citizens were effective public speakers.

Maintaining Freedom of Speech

Recently Archibald Cox, a distinguished law professor, was shouted down while trying to persuade a Harvard audience to grant supporters of President Nixon’s Vietnam policy a fair hearing. To the screaming, chanting group, Professor Cox tried to say, “If this meeting is disrupted, . . . then liberty will have died a little. . . . Freedom of speech is indivisible. You cannot deny it to one man and save it for others. . . . The price of liberty [to speak the truth as each of us sees it] is permitting others the same freedom.”