

**Effective Communication Skill as a Tool for Effective
Service Delivery**

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By

Akaa Bee Joseph

Research Fellow

National Judicial Institute

Abuja.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILL AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The main functions of the judiciary can be summarized as resolving conflicts, protecting the rights of individuals and the interest of the state. The public's perception of the judiciary and its confidence in the judicial system first and foremost are dependent on the public's notions of the task and competence of the judicial system. These notions and the related perception of the social functions of the judiciary are to an extent formed on the basis of the individual's personal experiences in the judicial system and the experiences of others. But like doctors in an emergency ward, the performance of the judiciary is, to a large extent, measured on when it falter rather than when they get things right .So the staff of the judiciary need to always be at their best and practice the principles of effective service delivery in order to avoid giving the judiciary a bad name.

There has been a consistent demand for a workplace culture of optimum performance in the judiciary. The theme for this workshop - "Building Capacity of Court Employees for Optimum Performance" is quite relevant to the call above. Effective communication in a work place plays a prominent role in improving service delivery and relationships within the judiciary on the one hand, and the

other stakeholders in the justice sector (prosecutors, prison police etc) as well as court users on the other hand.

It is against this background that this paper aims at realizing the following.

- I. Provide an overview of effective service delivery.
- II. Discuss various effective communication skills.
- III. Highlight the barriers to effective communication and how to overcome them
- IV. Then conclude with the benefits of effective service delivery in the judiciary.

2.0 What is a service?

The government provides services for people that live within its jurisdiction; the service could be transportation, communications facilities, justice administration and delivery, energy supplies, etc. A service can therefore be defined as something, value or activity that meets the needs of a user or can be applied by a user, which is provided in a planned and organized way by a government or business organizations¹. In the same vein, public services are those services provided by the levels and arms of governments to the public.

2.1 What is service delivery?

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_%28economics%29

Service delivery is the execution of those services and making sure they reach those people and places to whom and which they are intended². In simple terms it is an act of providing a service to a customer. In the judiciary, the ultimate service to the public is justice delivery. Thus, the functions or duties of every staff of the judiciary are part of the chain of activities that constitute justice delivery.

Citizens expect the quality of government service to be as high as or higher than service provided by the private sector. Delivering these services is at the heart of what most government agencies do, but the expectations of the citizens keeps rising. And the only way these expectations can be met is by delivering such services effectively.

2.2 What then is effective service delivery?

Effective service delivery is making sure that the standard of execution of service meets the customer's satisfaction. Service delivery takes place at an interface of human relations; and for service to be delivered effectively; the rules of human relations must be followed by all concerned. Wherever human relations are involved, there is bound to be friction, but how the staff of the judiciary avoid or manage this friction and make every court user happy will go a long way in boosting effective service delivery in the judiciary. Thus all court employees should see themselves as service representatives of the judiciary

The key components of effective service delivery are:

- **Building and Maintaining Relationships:** One of the most important aspects of being an effective human resource professional is to build and maintain relationships between yourself and your internal and external

² <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2014/05/13/what-does-service-delivery-really-mean>

clients, whether they are staff or even those seeking information from the court.

- **Managing Expectations:** In order to deliver superior results, the human resource professional needs to agree with any/all other departments on realistic, reachable, and agreeable expectations for all of its services.
- **Handling and Resolving Complaints:** As is the case with any service, some complaints will arise, whether it is human error, a computer error, or things beyond one's control. The organization has to deal with and resolve those complaints.
- **Time Service Delivery:** As a service provider you need to complete all task and services within the agreed time frame to avoid any other issues.
- **Continues Improvements:** Organizations should always find ways to improve its functions, whether it is a personnel, process or department.

From the list above, you can see that most of the components are influenced by how information is handled within an organization. But to know and measure the expectations of the court users and other staff of the judiciary, you need to understand them. How do you get to understand them? You need to communicate with them effectively.

3.0 What is communication?

In every human relationship impossible not to communicate and we communicate all the time. Communication is very critical to human existence. The word communication can be broadly defined as the sending or receiving of messages containing meaning. The messages usually contain thoughts, ideas, opinions, feelings and information.³ It is a transaction between two or more people in an

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>

attempt to create shared understanding, with all participants having an active role in the process.

Communication is simple yet complex, easy to do and easy to blunder. We send a lot messages each day. These include the message we intend to send, the message we actually send, the message as the receiver interprets it, the response of the receiver based on what he or she received, and our reaction to the exchange of words, meaning and interpretation.

Communicating effectively helps group members build trust and respect, foster learning and accomplish goals. Groups are made up of people who share a common interest and commitment, and yet perhaps see things from varied perspectives. Effective communication provides the platform upon which this diverse group of people will be able to understand issues and make decisions towards a common goal. ⁴Effective communication only takes place when the receiver understands and acts upon the message in the same way the sender intended. Effective communication therefore requires paying attention to the entire process, not just the content of the message. The common goal of the judiciary is to deliver justice effectively; but we have different groups (different cadres of staff, different levels of education, different cultures etc) and effective communication is the only way these group can achieve set goals.

3.1 What are the forms of communication?

The forms of communication⁵ are as follows:

⁴ <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/6103e/>

⁵ W.O Iguh 'Effective Communication Skills as Tools for Effective Service Delivery, a paper presented at the workshop for secretaries, Court Registrars, Process Clerks and bailiffs on Ethics and Anti-Corruption .Held at the NJI on 13TH -17th July, 2015.

3.1.1 Oral Communication

Oral/Verbal communication involves all messages that are sent using words. It could be through face-to-face conversation, telephone or other electronic/internet audio or audio-visual platforms, etc.⁶ Communicating verbally (with words) is important when we are trying to give someone information, for example our name or where they can get a service etc. The verbal part of the message is called the content. The content of the message usually relates to our thoughts and ideas about a particular issue, or it might refer to the information we give to someone. In work places, oral communication could be in form of speech during briefings, interviews, report delivery, meetings, etc.

Advantages

- It is easy to use. The channel is simple.
- Message reception is immediate and it encourages quick feedback.
- It provides signals to nonverbal communication especially in face-to-face conversations.

Disadvantages

- It has low record value. It has to be recorded for it to be correctly referred to.
- It is likely to be misinterpreted.

⁶ https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/CHCA0D42A/chcaod402a_csw/lo/8604_0

3.1.2 Written Communication

This involves any type of message that makes use of written words. This could be in hand-written, printed or electronic forms. Written communication is the most important and most effective mode of office or business communication. It is also the form of communication generally used in a work place like the judiciary for official transactions. Examples are memos, letters, notices, minutes, reports, bulletins, etc.

Advantages

- No need for personal contact
- It has high record value and good for official transactions.
- It reduces the chances of denial or misinterpretation.
- It provides better time for editing, revision or rehearsal before a message is sent.

Disadvantages

- Delay in communication. It takes more time to compose a written message and it is costly.
- It is only meaningful to the literate.
- Lack of secrecy⁷

3.1.3 Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal Communication refers to all those messages that are not expressed in words. Non-verbal communication is sometimes called ‘body language’. Sign language is also an example of a non-verbal communication. We also

⁷<http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-written-communication-in-business-definition-types-examples.html>

convey nonverbal elements in our speech in the forms of rhythm, intonation, volume, tempo, and stress. Similarly, our written texts show nonverbal components of communication such as our handwriting style, arrangement of words and the use of symbols that describe emotions in pictorial forms. Studies have shown that approximately 75% of our message is non-verbal so we must be careful of our body language.

Advantages

- It could be used to send secret messages.
- It saves time and space.
- It is flexible and has many meanings.

Disadvantages

- It is obscure. Only those familiar with its codes can use it.
- It has low record value
- It is likely to be misinterpreted

3.2 What are Effective Communication Skills?

Effective communication skills are fundamental to success in many aspects of life. Many jobs require strong communication skills. Effective communication is a key interpersonal skill and by learning how we can improve our communication has many benefits. We can communicate effectively by:

3.2.1 Listening

When asked to define communication, most people describe the techniques used to express what they think, feel, want, etc –namely talking, writing or body language. However, when you confront difficult issues, listening is the first step in

communicating effectively, more important than speaking or any form of expression. This is so because it shows that we are genuinely interested in a person and what they are communicating to us.

The way to show we are attentive to what someone is telling us is by using our non-verbal behaviour appropriately. We need to show people that we are physically and emotionally prepared to listen to them.

3.2.1.1 Benefits of active listening.

- It saves time because you cut through people's defenses and get more information without having to repeat the same conversation over and over.
- It helps the speaker clarify what they are saying and makes them feel heard.
- It helps you assess the situation accurately.
- It reduces emotions that block clear thinking.

Everyone can learn the art of listening. The key to listening effectively is relaxed attention, listen with your whole body by using verbal and non verbal skills like facing the person and maintaining eye contact, asking questions (but avoid interrupting the speaker).

3.2.1.2 Listening for specific information

You need to listen carefully when you are given instructions at work. One way to improve your listening skills is to listen for specific information. Make sure you know:

- I. How many task you need to complete
- II. In what order you should do the task
- III. How long the task should take

- IV. If you need to take any records
- V. What materials or equipment you need.

3.2.2 Expressive Skills

If half of the equation in communication is listening the other half is speaking and expressing what you think, feel or want in a clear, true and non-defensive way. Expressive skills are required for delivering or responding to a message effectively through the use of oral or written words as well as nonverbal expressions. It calls for mastery of the context and the technicalities of the mode of expression in order to ensure effectiveness of the process. Other variables in communication such as language, environment and distraction as well as the individuals involved in the process all have an effect on how messages are sent, received and interpreted. This requires you to choose correct voice, tone, pitch, word, grammar and language. Words are powerful tools. Using the right words can help you to build strong, long-lasting client relationship. When expressing yourself, you use “I” statements. Using “I” statements lets you share what you think or feel without sounding like you are blaming or attacking. Also, use inclusive language (words such as “We” and “our”) to identify you and the client, or the organization and the client as having same goals and objectives. Remember using a person’s name is an important part of building positive relationships.

3.2.3 Emotional Skills

Emotions are very fundamental to the way we communicate or make decisions. The way you respond to nonverbal signals propelled by emotions - anger, sadness,

fear, disgust, surprise, and joy affects both how you understand other people and how they understand you. When you are not conscious of your feelings, and do not understand how you feel or why you feel that way, you will find it difficult to communicate effectively. This can result in frustration, misunderstandings, and conflict. When you do not deal with your worries, you easily become involved in petty arguments.

Being conscious and in right control of your emotions at every moment enables you to understand both yourself and other people, and the actual messages they convey to you⁸. Thus, if you can maintain calm even in very difficult situations, you can communicate more clearly and effectively. Fortunately, emotional awareness is a skill that can be learned at any time in life: It only requires patience and practice. You can develop emotional awareness by learning how to get in touch with difficult emotions and manage uncomfortable feelings.

When you practice emotional awareness⁹, you will be able to:

- Identify and empathize with what really bothers other people. It is easy to feel empathy for someone with a similar world view .The challenge is to feel empathy when someone thinks in a different way.

3.2.3.1 Ways to show empathy

- I. Taking other's needs and concerns seriously
- II. Withholding uncouth advice
- III. Reserving judgment and blame

⁸ <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/improving-communication.html#ixzz3Wwj62n3b>

⁹ <http://www.developmentandmarketing.com/effective-communication-improving-communication-skills-in-business-and-relationships/>

- IV. Valuing feelings and attitude.
- V. Respecting other's privacy, experience and values.
- VI. Encouraging further elaboration and clarification

- Understand yourself, as well as what actually troubles you and what you really want
- Stay motivated to understand and empathize with the person you are interacting with, even if you do not like them or their message
- Communicate clearly and effectively, even when conveying negative messages
- Build strong, trusting, and rewarding relationships, think creatively, solve problems, and resolve conflicts

3.2.4 Stress Management Skills

Stress in the right measure could be a motivator for performance under pressure¹⁰. Yet, when stress becomes persistent and overpowering, it can hinder effective communication by upsetting your ability to think clearly and creatively, and act correctly. Similarly, when you are stressed, you are more likely to misunderstand other people, convey unclear or offensive nonverbal signals, and fall into unhealthy, hasty patterns of behaviour.

By learning to quickly reduce stress in the moment, you can safely face any strong emotions you are experiencing, regulate your feelings, and behave appropriately.

¹⁰ http://www.stress.about.com/od/relationships/a/conflict_res.ht

When you know how to maintain a relaxed, energized state of consciousness—even when something upsetting happens—you can remain emotionally available and engaged.

To deal with stress during communication, you need to¹¹:

- Know when you are getting stressed. Listen to your body to know if you are stressed as you communicate. Are your muscles or your stomach tight and/or sore? Are your hands clenched? Is your breath shallow? Are you "forgetting" to breathe? These are signs you are getting stressed.
- Take a moment to calm down before deciding to continue a conversation or postpone it.
- Call on your senses to help you and quickly manage stress by taking a few deep breaths, clenching and relaxing muscles, or recalling a comforting, sensory-rich image.
- Look for humor in the situation. You can employ humor to relieve stress when communicating. When you or those around you start taking things too seriously, find an appropriate way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or amusing story.
- Be willing to compromise. Sometimes, if you can both shift grounds, you will be able to find a happy middle ground that reduces the stress levels for everyone concerned.

4.0 Barriers to Effective Communication

There are barriers to effective communication. Removing those barriers will improve how we communicate. These elements slow down or distort the message

¹¹ <http://www.developmentandmarketing.com/effective-communication-improving-communication-skills-in-business-and-relationships/>

and intention of the message being conveyed and that may lead to a breakdown of the entire communication process. For effective communication to take place, you need to understand and be able to recognize barriers that hurt the communication process. And they are:

- **Not listening:** One of the most common barriers to communication is poor listening skills
- **Cultural Differences:** Dealing with different cultures can be difficult to navigate .Many times it's a different approach to doing things.
- **Language Differences:** Different languages that are spoken in the work place can affect your ability to communicate effectively
- **Me-too-ism:** Such as, “that’s nothing; let me tell you what happened to me!”These statements make the speaker feel unheard.
- **Emotional Blockade:** Emotion is one of the major determinants of how to act or react to things around us. Poor management of our emotions therefore could distort the message and intention of the message we convey or receive. When we are angry, for instance, it is easy to say things that we may later regret and also to misinterpret what others are saying.
- **Physical Barrier:** This might be the most common type of barriers that blocks the communication process
- **Moralizing, Preaching, being judgmental:** Recognize that the speaker may say something that offends your value system .Set asides the judgment so that you can listen.
- **Asking direct questions to satisfy your curiosity:** The speaker will share more information when ready.

- **Giving advice and consolation comments:** Such as “it is going to be alright”, I can understand, etc.
- **Analyzing or interrupting** Arguing or disagreeing with the speaker.
- **Information overload:** Information is blocked by the overwhelming amount of information.
- **Trust Issues:** When a person is not considered reliable as a source or receiver of message, the extent to which the person is listened to, believed or entrusted with valuable information is reduced, hence little or no communication takes place around such a person.

5.0 What does effective communication do to service delivery?

- Effective Communication will improve your overall work place culture. It can also eliminate barriers and resolve problems while at the same time building stronger work place relationships for increased productivity.
- Effective communication helps in improving relationship between management and staff, it is quite important and is often overlooked .Things will go on smoothly when everyone is on the same page ,understanding the goals and direction an organization is going.
- Effective communication in the work place plays a prominent role in developing long lasting employee motivation.
- Good communication skills also helps improve time management. The ability will exist for you to manage your own time as well as keeping other staff focused on deadlines.
- It is a vital tool for conflict management and redressing client grievances. Conflict in a workplace is virtually inevitable. Effective communication

enables you to communicate or manage even negative or difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust.

- Increases efficiency. Effective communication promotes the sharing of information and training of employees thus improving overall staff skills and assisting management in decision-making process.
- Promotes public trust in the judiciary through enhanced quality of service delivery.
- Effective communication is also crucial in modifying individual's attitudes, as a well-informed individual will likely have better attitude than a less-informed individual.
- Assists in controlling and evaluation processes. There are various levels of hierarchy and certain principles and guidelines that employees must follow in an organization. They must comply with organizational policies, perform their job role efficiently and communicate any work problem and grievance to their superiors. Thus, communication helps the management in its controlling and evaluating functions.
- Effective communication aids the recovery of feedback from court users which, if appropriately utilized, will encourage continuous improvement in the quality of justice delivery.

6.0 Some key communication skills with work place communication¹

- Handle workplace information
- Read and write workplace documents (notices, instructions and procedure).

- Work as an effective member of a team.
- Participate in team/departmental meetings
- Present /instruct and explain information.
- Solve problems, make decisions and manage conflict.
- If you cannot memorize details easily, learn how to take notes to remember what a speaker has said during meetings.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Communication is the blood line of any organization. In order to attain its main goal of effective service delivery, its employees need to judiciously employ the principles of effective service delivery by applying effective communication skills. Effective communication skills go a long way in shaping the organizational culture which the judiciary is trying to build. These skills or the lack of them form ‘judicial attitudes’ and consequently shape the perception of court users about the judiciary. Fortunately, these skills could be learnt, though not overnight. It is a conscious, determined, dedicated effort towards impacting positively through communication on every person that comes in contact with you. Having identified effective communication as the pillar of cooperation, collaboration and productivity in the judiciary, the question therein for every judiciary employee is - Do your communication habits and attitudes promote or impede effective justice delivery?

Thank you very much for your attention.