**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**HYBRID NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON COURT SERVICES**

*(Filing and Process Section of the Courts, Court Registrars, Commissioners of Oath, Court Clerks, Bailiffs, Process Servers, Confidential Secretaries, Executive Assistants, Protocol Officers, Information Desk Officers, Public Relation Officers and other Administrative Staff of the Judiciary)*

**Theme**: ***Advancing Justice through Effective Court Services***

 **Paper presented by:**

**Jariyat Ibrahim Ambali**

**Chief Studies Fellow,**

**National Judicial Institute, Abuja**

**COURSE OUTLINE**

* **INTRODUCTION**
* **Types of Communication**
* **Benefits of Effective Communication**
* **Tips to Boost Effective Business Communication**
* **Poor Communication**
* **What are the causes of poor communication in the workplace?**
* **What are the effects of poor communication in the workplace?**
* **What are the effects of poor communication in the workplace?**
* **Conclusion**

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**INTRODUCTION**

To thrive in both personal and professional life, certain skills are essential. Among these, communication skills play a pivotal role. Core among these skills are communication skills. These skills are a collective name for a group of skills which are necessary for both personal and career development.

Communication Theories

Communication is defined as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour.[[1]](#footnote-1)

One theory of communication was propounded by American political scientist and communication theorist Harold Lasswell[[2]](#footnote-2) who focused on individual elements of communication. It is also known as the Linear Model of Communication which is captured below:

Communicator Message Medium Receiver Effect

The process of communication is successful only when the receiver understands an idea as the sender intended it. Both parties must agree not only on the information transmitted but also on the meaning of that information. What this means is that, there must be a person trying to say something to another person in a way the other person should be able to understand. The essence of any message or communication is that, **it must be understood!**

**Types of Communication**

1. Verbal or oral
2. Non verbal
3. Written
4. Visual
5. Active listening

Verbal or Oral Communication involves the use of words to convey an intended message. It is the most obvious and understood mode of communication. This includes the words that comes out of our mouth, tone of our voice and things like sighs and groans. Examples of Verbal Communication includes Talking/chatting face-to-face or over the telephone, Recording a video, Public speaking, Preaching, Lecturing etc.

Non Verbal Communication involves the use of body language to pass across information. Examples include facial expressions; the human face is extremely expressive, able to convey countless emotions without saying a word, eye contact, gestures, posture etc. This type of communication constitute about 55% of all communication, underscoring its importance, just as the quote goes “Actions speak louder than words”. Good communicators learn the skill of using their body language to convey their message.

Written Communication involves any type of message that makes use of written words. This is the most important type of communication to us as court staff and its one of the most effective type of communication. Examples of this includes Letters, Text messages, Memos, Reports, E-mails, Business letters, Proposals, Bulletins etc. they are permanent records and used for future reference.

Visual communication is the transmission of information and ideas using symbols and imagery. It includes signs, graphic designs, films, artworks etc. Visuals effectively create an emotional response which is important since emotions are the basis for up to 80 percent of a person’s decision. Examples of this type of communication are: Videos, Pie Charts, Video recordings, Screen shots, and screen recordings.

Active listening is the practice of preparing to listen, observing what verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent, and then providing appropriate feedback for the sake of showing attentiveness to the message being presented. Active listening is listening to understand[[3]](#footnote-3). Active listening is also being fully engaged while another person is talking to you. It is listening with the intent to understand the other person fully, rather than listening to respond.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Examples of Active Listening includes: Being fully present in the conversation, showing interest by practicing good eye contact, noticing (and using) non-verbal cues, asking open-ended questions to encourage further responses, paraphrasing and reflecting back what has been said, listening to understand rather than to respond.

**The 7-38-55 Rule**

In communication, a speaker’s words only count for a small percentage of his or her efforts. The pitch and tone of the voice, the speed and rhythm of the spoken words, and the pauses between those words may tell more than what is being communicated by the words alone[[5]](#footnote-5).

One of the first advocates for the power of non-verbal communication was the renowned behavioral psychologist, and UCLA professor, Dr. Albert Mehrabian. Dr. Mehrabian’s extensive research on the topic of body language resulted in the 7-38-55 Percent Rule. The 7-38-55 Rule indicates that only 7% of all communication is done through verbal communication, the words we speak, whereas the nonverbal component of our daily communication, such as the tonality of our voice, make up 38% and 55% from the speaker’s body language and facial expressions[[6]](#footnote-6). In essence, where words and actions disagree, people would naturally tend towards actions.

Spoken Words: 7%

Tone of Voice: 38%

Body Language: 55%



In our working relationships, we have a certain professional ways in which we present ourselves at work, and this reflects in the way we communicate.

However, regardless of where we communicate: at work, or with family and friends, there are certain aspects present in all our interactions.

In his research, Professor Albert Mehrabian recognised that when we communicate, there are three main elements we all use, and he created a communication model to demonstrate this.

This is the 7-38-55 rule or model, where we get a deeper insight to how one expresses oneself.

In our world, and especially in a professional setting, we put a lot of emphasis on verbal language. It is not considered appropriate to show too much emotion, because, after all, you are at work, behave ‘professionally’. However, emotion is present in every single communication, even when we adapt to the professional situation[[7]](#footnote-7).

It turns out that only 7% of meaning is communicated in the words we use in an interaction, and what is really picked up by the listener is our tone of voice (38%), and body language (55%), which are all about the emotional factors. In short, these latter two are the aspects of our communication which are unconsciously governed by our feeling / emotional state. This awareness can allow us to become better communicators as we understand that our emotions drive our behaviour[[8]](#footnote-8).

It can help us to develop our skills as leaders, as we can assess our communication, and fine-tune our abilities to motivate, give feedback, build rapport, and be a more active listener.

Understanding and purposefully using the different elements of the 7-38-55 model can be a foundation to expand our communication skills, and style, and therefore enhance the productivity of our teams, build trust, and engagement[[9]](#footnote-9).

**Benefits of Effective Communication**

1. **Effective communication builds trust.**When leaders set the standard for communication across the organisation, encouraging collaboration and teamwork, they form a positive example for team members. A trusting work environment excels when colleagues communicate openly and practice active listening.
2. **Effective communication promotes team loyalty.**When leaders communicate thoughtfully with their subordinates rather than oversee them from a distance, the subordinates feel appreciated and valued. This typically results in higher job satisfaction, better performance, and increased loyalty.
3. **Effective communication enhances team member engagement.**While many organisations employ unique strategies to increase team member engagement, they often overlook daily, open communication skills. Having open lines of clear communication, both upward and lateral, makes an impact on employee engagement and satisfaction.
4. **Effective communication improves teamwork.** Good communication is the backbone of team building and strong cross-functional bonds. Leadership should model and promote an organisational culture of effective communication—clear, direct, timely, and respectful—to strengthen collaboration and foster better relationships. This should include both [verbal and nonverbal communication](https://www.grammarly.com/business/learn/types-of-business-communication/), like written communication and body language.
5. **Effective communication boosts productivity.**Effective communication ensures that instructions, expectations, and goals are clearly communicated to employees. When employees understand what is expected of them, they can prioritize tasks, allocate resources efficiently, and focus their efforts on achieving desired outcomes.
6. **Effective communication fuels innovation.**When team members can freely share information and ideas with colleagues and leadership, innovation flourishes. Effective communication fosters collaboration, creativity, team building, and problem-solving.
7. **Effective communication resolves issues.**Teams can typically resolve (or avoid) internal problems with good communication that promotes active listening and respectful and professional responses. Turning potential arguments into constructive and productive conversations can only benefit a team’s success and help them stay connected.
8. **Effective communication creates better client relationships.** When an organisation promotes good communication among its teams, that practice often translates to successful interactions with clients or end users. Clients appreciate open and transparent communication, which helps to build trust.

It’s clear that the benefits of good communication extend to every area of our work. Now it’s time to put it into practice and [boost effective communication skills](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/improve-communication-skills/) across your organization.

**Tips to Boost Effective Business Communication**

We know the benefits of effective communication, but how do you actually attain them in practice? Here are some tips to improve your communication style at work:

1. **Be clear and concise:**Make sure your message is clear and to the point. Avoid using jargon and complex language that could confuse your audience.
2. **Employ active listening:** Effective communication is a two-way process. Make sure you use active listening skills and respond accordingly.
3. **Communicate respectfully:**Respect is the foundation of good business communication. Always communicate in a way that is respectful to others, regardless of their position in the company.
4. **Use nonverbal communication:**Nonverbal communication, such as body language and tone of voice, can convey a lot of information. Pay attention to your nonverbal cues and make sure they align with your message.
5. **Choose the right channel:**Different[channels of communication](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/channels-of-communication/), such as email, phone, or face-to-face, support different goals. Choose the right medium for the message you want to convey.
6. **Be timely:** It’s important to communicate in a timely manner. Respond promptly to messages and communicate any updates or changes as soon as possible.
7. **Practice empathy:**Put yourself in the shoes of the other person and try to understand their perspective. This can help you communicate more effectively and avoid misunderstandings.
8. **Provide constructive feedback:**Feedback is an important part of effective communication. When providing feedback, be constructive and specific, and focus on ways to improve rather than criticize.

**Poor Communication**

## What is poor communication in the workplace?

Poor communication is the inability to convey information effectively; it hampers understanding, resulting in confusion, alienation, and decreased productivity. When the understanding between two people is not mutual i.e. the person being communicated with misunderstands what you’re trying to communicate.

Poor workplace communication might mean that lines of communication are entirely broken, but this is relatively rare. More often, communication issues occur when there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is heard, whether between colleagues or between an employee and a client. More specifically, the understanding between two people is not mutual when the person being communicated with misunderstands what you’re trying to communicate.

Communication problems are often caused by a myriad of challenges, including a person’s limiting beliefs, lack of clear strategy and objectives, information overload, limited feedback (how do you know you’re doing it right?) and poor leadership tone from the top.

## What are the causes of poor communication in the workplace?

### Poor Leadership: Employees look to business owners and their managers for direction in the workplace. Good communication that starts from the top down motivates staff members to be more productive and innovative. These good leaders clearly communicate objectives, goals, and future visions.

Poor leaders, on the other hand, are often indecisive and unable to inspire their teams. They may be impatient in their communication style, conveying that impatience through their tone of voice, facial expressions, or other means of nonverbal communication.

Poor communication and [bad leadership](https://www.simpplr.com/blog/2021/10-characteristics-bad-leadership/) may also stem from managers who lack information themselves. These managers are unable to answer questions or clarify points, so their employees are left even more confused and frustrated than when they started.

### Unclear Objectives: Goals and objectives are powerful in business, as they focus attention on achieving desirable outcomes, such as profitability. Profitability does not just happen magically. It requires attentive employees who know what management expects them to accomplish and transparent objectives provide that direction.

If organizations lack clear strategic goals, or if managers are not informed of the tactical objectives their teams are expected to meet, employees will not receive the direction they need. This leads to confusion and frustration. Employees may end up underperforming even when trying their best.

### Limited Feedback: Feedback is information that flows to a person who performed an action, informing that person of the results of that action. It is one of the most important forms of communication because it’s where real learning happens.

Effective [employee feedback](https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/employee-feedback/), both positive and negative, provides valuable information for making important decisions and improvements in the future. Top-performing companies recognize feedback as a key step in their continuous improvement cycles.

Without clear testing steps for each iteration and action, feedback will be limited. For example, does a new website form represent a significant improvement over the old one? Is a new product feature significantly easier to use? Without good feedback, employees will not have clear direction for improvement.

### Demoralized Employees: When an employee loses interest in their work, they often become disengaged, creating communication problems for the company. Employees who feel demoralized often feel unvalued, unappreciated, and even disrespected despite their capacities and talents. This will often lead to the employee becoming unproductive and irritable, disregarding open lines of communication.

Restoring employee morale may involve reevaluating workplace culture to create an environment in which employees are personally invested enough to work—and communicate—with a good attitude.

## What are the effects of poor communication in the workplace?

### Workplace Conflict

The effects of poor communication may cause tensions to rise, resulting in potential conflicts between employees. Although they might not be immediately obvious, these tensions can cause two-way communication to break down even more.

An unwillingness to communicate may cause employees to make the wrong assumptions, resulting in work that has to be repeated—sometimes over and over. Good communication prevents workplace tensions from arising in the first place.

### Unpredictable Work Environment

Poor communication causes a lack of predictability and stability within the workplace, leading to an uneasy environment for employees to work in. Employees might not clearly understand their objectives or might misunderstand the process for a project, leading to poor productivity and ineffectiveness at their job. Employees and employers have a responsibility to facilitate an active dialogue in order to create a stable work environment in which employees can do their best work.

### Less Effective Collaboration

Collaboration and communication go hand in hand. If employees are unable to communicate effectively, collaboration is very likely to suffer as well. [Collaboration in the workplace is important](https://www.simpplr.com/blog/2019/importance-of-collaboration-in-the-workplace/) in many ways, from promoting self-analysis to efficient problem-solving. Without collaboration, teams end up working in isolated silos, unaware of the progress and learning that has been achieved in other areas. Where employees cannot collaborate together, how do they collaborate with clients or outsiders?

### Low Morale

With poor communication, employees may have a harder time meeting expectations and deadlines, resulting in them falling behind. This could leave them with a sense of guilt, embarrassment, or even low self-esteem. This, in turn, can lead to significant drops in job satisfaction and a significant rise in attrition.

## Lack of communication between management and employees

Although the lack of effective communication between management and employees can lead to significant frustration, poor communication is rarely intentional. In most cases, breakdowns in communication can be traced back to poor communication skills or simply not having the right communication tools.

In many cases, poor communication skills can start with one’s foundational beliefs about communication that get in the way:

* **We believe we are born as an effective communicator**, or that there is a magic pill available, and therefore don’t practice and don’t get better. If you are born with an innate talent for speaking or communicating, you still have to work to develop your effectiveness, which takes time, practice and patience. Think of someone who was born with an incredible amount of natural talent, skill and ability for a particular sport. Even if an athlete has more innate talent than another, if they lack discipline and don’t practice regularly, they may quickly find themselves outpaced or outplayed.
* **We’re afraid of failing, and that fear stops us from trying and learning new things or skills.** Whether we realize it or not, we all are wired at some level to fear or avoid failure. From a Darwinian standpoint, this avoidance of situations that we are not good at allowed us to stay alive by avoiding danger; neuroscience and psychology tell us today that we still have a bit of this, with theory such as the very familiar idea of “fight or flight.” Essentially, if we have never done it before, and we know we may not be good at it at first, then inadvertently or subconsciously, we avoid doing it.
* **We have a mistaken belief that good communication is all common sense.** If it is common sense, then it’s unlikely that you’ll put in the effort required to communicate well. People have grown up in different cultures, countries, with different values, have different drives and needs. Therefore, it’s a trap to think, “People think as I do.” [**Effective communication**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/principles-of-communication) is complex because how we communicate needs to be adapted by the person, their style and the situation.
* **We unintentionally communicate from our own perspective.** We’re very clear about what we think in our heads. But communication happens in the mind of the listener, and it’s important to communicate from your audience’s perspective with the focus, detail and attention that real communication demands. Work gets done through others and the more you know about them, the better you’re able to motivate and move them to action.

By addressing these communication pitfalls you will have a different paradigm through which you will view your career, your ability to lead others, your ongoing interactions with others, and your decisions. If nothing else, I hope that reflecting on these common pitfalls will fundamentally change how you see your work and how you see communications’ role in your work.

**Conclusion**

In general, effective communication can improve relationships at home, work, and in social situations by deepening your connections to others and improving teamwork, decision making and problem solving. It enables you to communicate even negative or difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust. Effective communication combines a set of skills including nonverbal communication, attentive listening, the ability to manage stress in the moment, and the capacity to recognize and understand your own emotions and those of the person you’re communicating with. Research has provided insight into the processes of human perception and communication. These insights have led to the development of tools and procedures that increase significantly the effectiveness of that communication significantly.

Effective Communication in the workplace is not just exchanging information. When done well, there is real power in internal communications to move organizations forward, engaging employees in collective action that supports the organization’s mission and vision, boost productivity and being fulfilled.

1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>. accessed on 7July, 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Muth,R,;Finley, M.; Muth, M. (1990). Harold D. Lasswell: An Annotated Bibliography. New Haven: New HavenPress. P. 19. accessed on 7July, 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening> accessed on 7July, 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.progressivedentalmarketing.com/continuing-education/the-7-38-55-percent-rule-why-its-important/#:~:text=The%207%2D38%2D55%20Rule,body%20language%20and%20facial%20expressions>. accessed on 7July, 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-38-55-rule-diana-adamko-coaching-i-training-i-consulting>. accessed on 7 July, 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-9)