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Communication

Nicki Stanton

*Consultant in Management Development and
Communication*

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Preface

Why? The purpose of this book is to help anyone who is interested in improving their communication skills and their knowledge of the way in which communication functions in business, by providing a self-contained book which will both stand on its own without the aid of a teacher, and complement a taught course.

Who? Like its companion volume, it is intended to help:

- students on BTEC, SCOTVEC, National and Higher level courses, A-level students and students on other professional courses to improve their skills in communicating by learning and practising techniques on their own;
- teachers in colleges, whether communication specialists or not, who are concerned to improve their students' communication skills, but who find there is never enough time in the timetable to give students sufficient chance to get the practice which is so essential if their knowledge and skills are really to develop satisfactorily; and
- anyone interested in communication and keen to become a more effective communicator but who is unable to take advantage of a course at a college or at work.

What? The book covers the main communication tasks with which you are likely to be confronted – telephoning, interviewing, meetings, giving talks and oral presentations, writing letters, reports (long and short), questionnaires, memos and so on. In addition you will find chapters on non-verbal communication, listening and reading, and the use of visual aids – boards, projectors, films and so on, and on visual communication – graphs, charts etc.

The final part deals with the basic elements of English grammar and usage and is intended either to help you brush up your knowledge of English or to act merely as a quick reference section together with some useful reference lists in the appendices at the back of the book.

How? In order to help you check your progress as you work through the book, you will frequently come across questions and exercises.

Self-checks are usually short questions or exercises to test your understanding of what you have just read, or to find out what you know already, before reading on. Try not to read on to the discussion of these questions until you have at least attempted an answer for yourself. Try not to cheat – it will only hinder your progress – but if you are really stuck, then read on or check back over the last few pages.

Exercises are similar to self-checks but come at the end of a chapter or section to test your understanding of the whole chapter. Again, if you have difficulty answering these, go back over the previous section or chapter.

Activities are longer exercises usually at the end of chapters to help you apply your knowledge and practise the skills and techniques you have learned. However, sometimes these activities occur in the middle of a chapter and ask you to carry out some observations or do some research over a longer period of time. Make a note of them when you get to them to remind you what to do or what to look out for during the next few days or weeks.

In writing this book my aim has been to adopt a tone and style of writing which both reflects acceptable current practice and makes the reader's task as easy as possible. I have therefore not always adhered strictly to some of the older 'rules' of writing, which the purist would regard as essential to good writing style. As I have explained in Chapters 19 and 20, on English and grammar, the English language has gradually changed over the centuries, and these changes are still taking place. I believe my task is to indicate to the reader what is acceptable to good, modern writers *now*, at the end of the twentieth century.

However, in 'breaking' one rule, I have perhaps been particularly controversial. Normally in business writing nowadays we would not use contractions ('don't' for 'do not', 'can't' for 'cannot') unless we knew the reader extremely well and were permitted by the circumstances to write in a very casual style. I have chosen to use contractions and a generally informal, although I believe correct, style of writing in order to lighten the tone of the book and give the reader, particularly the self-study reader, the feeling that I am talking rather than writing, and that we are working together.

I have also occasionally used the 'he' form for convenience in order to avoid the rather clumsy 'he/she' form, although both should be understood by the use of 'he'. On other occasions, to avoid the

dilemma altogether, I have used the plural form 'they' or 'their' with 'anyone', which is singular, e.g. 'anyone who wishes to improve their communication skills'. This is strictly speaking incorrect and likely to offend the purists, but it is becoming an increasingly acceptable way of avoiding the 'his/her problem'.

When? The chapters in this book inevitably develop from one another. However, each chapter is designed to be complete and self-contained, enabling you to pick up the book and make use of those odd hours between other demands on your time.

Where? Armed only with this book and a pen and paper, you should be able to work through the various chapters at home, at college, in a library, on buses, trains or even planes. However, in some of the chapters that deal with speaking skills you may find a small tape-recorder useful, in which case you may prefer to work in privacy.

So – good luck, and above all, enjoy yourself! Learning should be fun and the way in which human beings communicate is always fascinating even when we fall short of perfection, which we all too often do.

Acknowledgements

No idea can really be said to be original – for every ‘new idea’ is a development of the countless ideas which have gone before. Any book is therefore merely an expression of the knowledge, experience and skill acquired during the author’s lifetime of contact with other people. To all those people who have in any way been influential in my own development and learning and who have therefore contributed, often without my knowing, to the ideas expressed in this book, I owe my gratitude.

However, my special thanks are due to my colleagues at Bristol Polytechnic, Swindon College, and Rede Group, and to all my students, in colleges and in industry and commerce, with whom over the years I have learned about the process of communication.

For their patient and tireless, practical and moral support I thank my husband, Mike, and my two children, Matthew and Abigail.

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