

*PERFORMANCE  
MANAGEMENT*

*QUICK  
GUIDE*

**Communication**

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[Quick Guide to Communication](#)

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Performance Management Quick Guide - Communication

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# Communication

## Introduction

The purpose of this Communications Style Guide is to offer some guidance on ways to communicate with our customers, both on the telephone and by letter, so that we convey the message that this really is a “personal service” and that we want to help.

We each have our own style in the way we communicate and we should not lose it: however, there are certain ground rules that, if followed, can improve the communication process, clarify the message (both for the sender and the receiver), and enhance our relationship with our client.

Needless to say, exactly the same techniques can be used within your private life as well as within your business and thus we can enhance our communications and relationships in all areas.

We all think that we can communicate well, but it is a fact that communication is a two-way operation and, although WE may feel we have been clear, the other person may not have understood our message. As a high ranking Navel Officer once remarked:

*“I would like you to know that what you think you heard me say may not have been what I said nor what I meant to say”*

This remark is especially true when we are using the English language as a means of communication with people to whom it is a second language and even more so when it is our second language.

Much of the problem can be overcome if we remember to use the 5C's of effective communication by being:

Clear  
Concise  
Concrete  
Creative  
Correct

In this Guide you will find some simple, straightforward ideas for enhancing your communications, and some notes on writing memos.

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## Style:

### Getting back to Basics

Plot a strategy:

THINK FIRST, WRITE LATER - Writing experts often say that clear writing is the result of clear thinking. Yet some people draft or dictate their letters right off the cuff - without stopping to think about the issues, the people involved, or the best course of action to suggest.

The first step is to ensure we really know what we are to write about - to be PRACTICAL and Get the Facts by evaluating the situation and asking ourselves:

“What are the principal issues?”

The second step is “know” who we are going to write to - to be PERSONAL and try and Size up our Reader by determining feelings (if possible) from recent communications from them and ask ourselves:

“Who is my reader?”

The third step is to be POSITIVE and decide that we are going to Resolve the Issue by carefully planning our response based on our analysis of the issues (the facts) and our reader’s profile (the feelings). Before we start to write we must ask ourselves:

“How can I.....

Respond? ...Resolve? ...Apologise? ...Thank?

and ...Capitalise on the situation?”

The final step is to choose a style. Should we be *Assertive*; should we be *Objective*; should we be *Diplomatic*; or should we be *Informal*. Obviously, elements of one style will overlap another but we must be aware of the different styles.

### Choosing a Style:

#### Assertive

An Assertive communication gets right to the point. It’s a good way to project your message with clarity and confidence. But save this style for instances when you have the upper hand. Otherwise, your forcefully worded statements may offend or discourage your reader or listener.

When communicating in the Assertive Style:

Use the Active Voice to give your message added punch. (“Please compile the reports and send them to me immediately” rather than “The reports should be compiled as soon as possible”)

Say “I” and “You” to clarify who is responsible for what. (“I expect your answer on Monday” rather than “We expect an answer on Monday”)

Say it Directly (“Your account is overdue” rather than “It has come to my attention that your payment has not been received”)

Use Simple Sentences - avoid introductory phrases. (“I need your budget tomorrow” rather than “Although time is short, I would appreciate your sending the budget to me tomorrow”)

Avoid “Weasel” Words (“I’m confident this plan will work” rather than “Perhaps this plan is the best alternative open to us”)

Situations where this style is appropriate:

- When the communication calls for action
- When saying “No” to a subordinate

## Objective

Objective communications allow you to keep a polite distance between you and the reader or listener. By design, they are impersonal in tone and a bit more formal than you normally write or speak. Use this style when relaxed informality seems inappropriate or premature, or when an objective stance will make it easier to convey bad news without appearing accusatory. Objective communications remove your personality from a situation, so they should be reserved for instances where this is your intent.

When communicating in the Objective style:

Use the Passive Voice to distance yourself from negative situations or unpleasant observations. (“A more comprehensive plan should be supplied ..” rather than “Expand the current plan before you send it ...”)

Emphasize the Corporate “We” - avoid saying “I” or “You” or using names. (“We believe that another financial obligation might cause undue strain” rather than “I don’t think you could handle a further loan, Mr. Client”)

Maintain a Formal Tone by using polite words and phrases. (“In view of these reasons, I must decline the opportunity” rather than “I just don’t want the responsibility of another committee membership right now”)

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Use certain “Slow-motion” techniques like qualifiers to delay the other person’s confrontation with sensitive concepts. (“We cannot afford to extend you further credit under the circumstances” rather than “I can’t approve your loan”)

Situations where this style is appropriate:

- When saying “No” to a customer
- When responding to a simple inquiry from someone you do not know
- When conveying technical information to an audience
- When writing a routine Memo to someone you do not know

## **Diplomatic**

In certain delicate business situations, assuming a diplomatic attitude can help you demonstrate your respect for the other person. This tone signals that you’re not out to prove yourself right, but rather to inform, clarify, or resolve situations to mutual satisfaction. Effectively used, this style positions you as being polite and can sometimes help the other person save face. But don’t overdo it. If you’re too humble or fawning, you won’t be taken seriously.

When you communicate in the Diplomatic style:

Use the Passive Voice to avoid placing the blame directly on others. (“The details were not available” rather than “John Brown did not have the details available”)

Stress the Corporate “We” by avoiding saying “you” or “I”. (“We’re sorry to say” rather than “I’m sorry to say”)

Offer Suggestions instead of giving orders. (“Perhaps it would be wise to..” rather than “I recommend that you..”)

Use Introductory Phrases and heavier paragraphs. (“Due to this unexpected problem, we....” rather than “I did not complete your transaction because..”)

End on a Positive or constructive note. (“We look forward to receiving your reply”)

Situations where the Diplomatic style is appropriate:

- In an internal communication to a person in a higher position
- In a communication conveying negative information

## **Informal**

Communications in the Informal style are relaxed, direct, and conversational. They acknowledge the personality of both parties; sometimes using elements like humour or colourful language that's inappropriate in most business communications. Your informal communications should reflect the way you speak. Keep them simple and sincere and they'll be effective.

When communicating in the informal style:

Use the Active Voice to show your personal involvement. ("We've credited your account.." rather than "Your payment was credited by us")

Say "I", "we", and "you". ("I understand why you are angry" rather than "Your anger is understandable")

Use Short Words and Sentences. ("Thanks for writing to me directly" rather than "I certainly appreciate the fact that you directed this letter to my personal attention")

Use Contractions to sound conversational. ("You're right in your calculations, and we'll send your cheque today")

Avoid "Weasel" Words. ("We will correct the problem on your next statement" rather than "It is possible that the problem could be corrected on the next statement")

Situations where this style is appropriate:

When apologising for an error

When conveying good news

When requesting action from a peer

When marketing a service or product

When following up on a phone conversation.

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## Memorandums and E-Mail

### A Memorandum about Memorandums and E-mails

To: All Employees  
From: The Customer Communications Team  
Date: dd/mm/yy

Subject: **Writing Memos and E-mail**

As you know, memos and e-mail are internal business communications used to convey information from one person or department to another. We're writing this one to remind you of a few simple rules which can make your memo's and e-mails more effective.

1.0 Prepare to write your memos and e-mails by using the three P's. Get the facts, size up your reader, then come up with a strategy for the memo or e-mail, which will have positive effect. (See Getting back to Basics for details)

2.0 Match the style of the memo or e-mail to the situation and the relative position of the person to whom you are writing. We've listed some possible options below:

(a) Objective Style: When writing a routine memo or e-mail to a peer, or when responding to a simple inquiry.

(b) Informal Style: When your memo or e-mail requests action from a peer, or when you're conveying good news.

(c) Diplomatic Style: When your memo or e-mail is going to a person in a higher position, especially when it conveys negative information.

(d) Assertive Style: When you say "no" to a request action from a subordinate.

3.0 Use a simple, easy-to-read format. Number your main points. Indent or underline for emphasis.

4.0 Offer a choice of actions whenever possible.

5.0 Recap or attach the information that the reader needs to understand the issues raised in the memo or e-mail.

6.0 Keep memos and e-mails to a reasonable length - generally no more than two pages.

In summary, effective memo's and e-mails follow the same basic rules as other effective business communications. They should be carefully conceived, clearly written, and presented in a format, which makes important points easy to identify.

And finally, they should be proof read carefully for errors of content and grammar. Like any other piece of communication, your memo's and e-mails say a lot about you. Let it all be positive.

END



## Communications Checklist

All effective communications follow certain basic guidelines. Review the checklist below before communicating, especially in writing. It will help you become a more careful communicator - whether you've chosen the informal, assertive, objective, or diplomatic style.

### **REPLY PROMPTLY**

Communications are only as effective as they are timely.

### **USE WORDS CORRECTLY**

Make sure you are using the correct words to convey your message. Make sure you have spelt them correctly.

### **USE THE LANGUAGE CONSISTENTLY**

Use either British or American English but not a mixture of both. Check for spellings.

### **AVOID OLD-FASHIONED OR STILTED PHRASE**

Avoid phrases such as: in reference to, pursuant to, enclosed herewith, refer to the undersigned, your letter of the 14th inst. and so on, it only makes you sound pompous.

### **AVOID JARGON**

Do not use in-house abbreviations, which may be unclear to the reader or listener.

### **BE RESPECTFUL**

Even if you are saying no or pointing out an error. Remember, the client may not always be right, but he is always the client and no one has ever won an argument with a client.

### **MAKE SURE YOUR LETTER LOOKS INVITING**

Make sure you have laid out your letter or memo in an attractive and easily read way. Avoid large blocks of print by breaking up paragraphs or indenting to make points.

### **READ YOUR FINISHED DRAFT ALOUD**

By reading the letter or memo aloud you will see if it sounds natural and flows smoothly.

## PROOF READ YOUR LETTERS AND MEMOS

Proof read for typing errors and grammatical errors.

## EDIT YOUR DRAFTS

If time allows. Edit all written communications to cut out unnecessary words.

## REVIEW YOUR LETTERS, MEMO'S, AND E-MAILS

Always read your written communications to see how the reader will see them. Review from the reader's point of view.

## ENSURE THE COMMUNICATION ACHIEVES ITS OBJECTIVE

# Non-Verbal Communication

A great many words have been written about non-verbal communication. Some books “dramatise” the subject and make it sound “sexy” - using titles containing the words “body language”. Others address the subject in greater depth, and some - mainly written by psychology professors at obscure US universities - reflect the scientific approach.

The truth is, WE ARE ALL EXPERT (TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT) AT READING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION. Research carried out by psychologists around the world has shown that between 65% and 95% of ALL face-to-face communication is non-verbal - and since we are all pretty good at communicating, this means we must be pretty good at reading non-verbal communications.

But what is non-verbal communication?

Answer: Everything involved in communicating ideas but which is not spoken - the way you dress, the way you move, the way you stand and sit, your gestures, where you look, the way you smile, all these are areas of non-verbal communication.

The truth is, we do not pay enough attention to non-verbal communication. Little realising that the non-verbals give us away, we tend to say “people have to take me as they find me”. Within a closed group (for example: the sales team, the management team) we all become familiar with, and tolerant of, others’ non-verbal style - just as we become familiar with, and tolerant of, their verbal style. **But when we meet someone infrequently, or for the first time - as with our customers - the impression they gain about us AND ABOUT THE COMPANY is 95% conveyed by the non-verbals.**

Putting bluntly: It does not matter how competent you are, if the customer does not like the way you dress or the way you are, then he is not going to have a good impression of you and is not going to want to do business with you or the company. First impressions count - they take just seconds to create but can last a life time.

## Dressing to Win

Kenneth Karpinski in his book "The Winner's Style" and Carole Jackson in "Colour for Men" provide good advice in this area but here are the seven most vital **DOs** and **DON'Ts**:-

1. DO ensure that what you wear creates the impression you want to give.
2. *DON'T wear black. Black arouses very negative emotions and you are likely to be seen as untrustworthy, sinister, and potentially violent.*
3. DO be restrained in the way your dress. Avoid wearing bright colours or flamboyant clothing unless this is the accepted dress code for the bank (which it is not).
4. *DON'T have anything in the top jacket pocket. No pens, pencils, glasses, calculators.*
5. DO think very carefully about having a beard or longer than average hair - they tend to have an image which, while acceptable in the arts, theatre, and academic world, can arouse negative responses in the commercial world.
6. DO choose your glasses with care if you need them. The wrong frames have an adverse impact on your appearance, tinted lenses arouse feelings of extreme mistrust.
7. *DON'T overlook details - small points make all the difference when making an impression. Here are four things most people miss in checking their own appearance but always spot in others:*
  - a) *Dirty, chewed or poorly trimmed finger nails;*
  - b) *Unhealthy complexion (both in men and women);*
  - c) *Too much (or too little) make-up on women; and*
  - d) *Badly polished shoes (including the heels).*

## Standing and Moving

People like to do business with winners. The way you stand and move indicates very clearly which category you fall into.

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Make yourself as tall as the structure of your body allows - this also applies when seated. This is frequently expressed as stand up straight, sit up straight, stomach in, bottom in. This has two additional advantages (other than creating a powerful impression of being a winner) - a) it helps muscles relax, and b) it will avoid back strain and back injury.

When you move make all your movements have purpose. Walk in an unhurried manner, but not necessarily in a slow manner.

Take command of the space you are in, this projects confidence and inspires confidence. But be careful not to “invade” other people’s private space (especially in a business environment) as this induces discomfort, fear, and rejection.

### **Learn to read non-verbals in others**

People betray themselves through their non-verbals. They may say they are telling the truth but their body says they are lying. They may say they are relaxed, confident, happy, open to suggestions, listening, attentive - but their non-verbals tell a different story.

Watch for changes in non-verbal behaviour, and look for groups of non-verbals (known as gesture clusters) these tell you when someone’s attitude has changed. Trying to judge a change of attitude from just one or two non-verbal clues can be very dangerous.

As you become more comfortable with reading non-verbals your success in any encounter will rise - especially in sales interviews when “buying signals” are frequently non-verbal. If a non-verbal buying signal is missed, you run the risk of going beyond the point of closure. If a “gesture cluster” indicates a buying signal - try a close, you may be early, but generally you will find the closing sequence can be established far earlier than you may think.

All top sales people, and most successful managers, are good at reading non-verbals (even if done unconsciously) - it is a skill that can be learned and enhanced and should be practised.

### **Control your own non-verbals**

Just as you are careful in your choice of words - be careful in your choice of non-verbals. Make sure your non-verbals are telling the other person what you would like them to hear.

The way you sit, the way you listen, the way you respond can all be controlled and thus you can control the reactions of others -this is very important in selling. Remember, all actions attract responses, negative non-verbals attract negative responses while positive non-verbals attract positive responses. This is very important to all of us, but even more so in managing for performance in a sales environment.

Here are a few DOs and DON'Ts:

1. DO focus your attention on the person you are speaking to - show them you really are listening. When you break eye contact, break DOWNWARDS - breaking sideways indicates extreme disinterest.
2. *DON'T fiddle. Don't play with your pen, papers, computer, or anything else, when listening or talking to a customer (or colleague) - it is discourteous and indicates impatience and disinterest in what the other is saying.*
3. DO demonstrate interest by sitting forward (but do not invade their side of the desk).
4. *DON'T read or write ANYTHING while someone is talking to you - you may believe you can do two things at once but you can't -and, anyway, there is no stronger way of showing your contempt for what the other person is saying. If you have to write notes (which you should do) then break the flow at a convenient point, tell them you need to note down some points, and write your thoughts down.*
5. DO look at people when you are talking to them - establish eye contact - it focuses their attention, and yours, and demonstrates that you have respect for what you are saying.
6. *DON'T try to dominate an interview - it causes feelings of fear in the other person. Be careful that your non-verbals reflect confidence and not aggression.*
7. DO have fun - smile (especially with your eyes), use gestures, be animated, show passion for what you do, all these things create a positive environment which encourages others to interact with you in a positive manner - and, if you are selling, will result in enhanced sales performance.

Finally, remember the old saying: ***It's not what you say that matters, but the way you say it.***