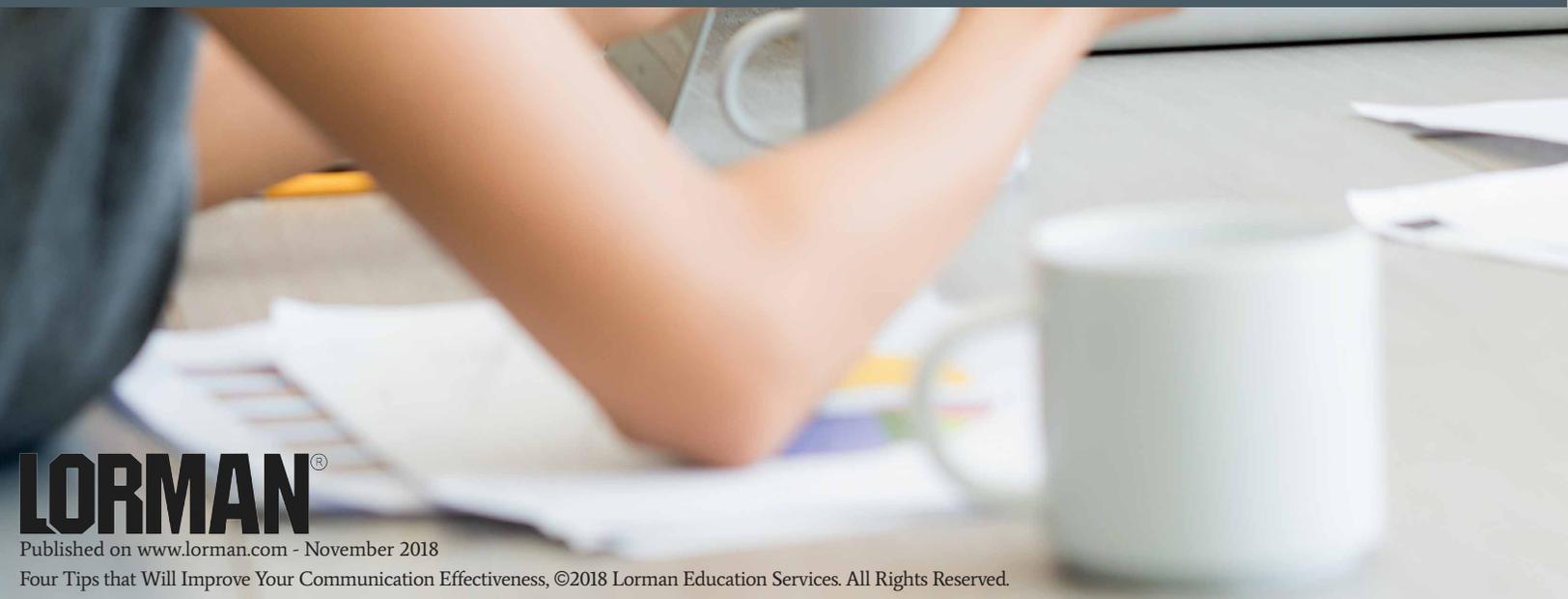




Four Tips that Will Improve Your Communication Effectiveness

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Four Tips that Will Improve Your Communication Effectiveness

Written by Guy Harris

If you want to become more effective as a leader, more successful in meetings, or more confident while resolving conflicts, become a better communicator.

On the high end of the communication skill spectrum, you find that great leaders – like Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr – are often great communicators. On the low-end, research indicates that poor communication skills can contribute to family disputes escalating to domestic violence.

Evidence from research, experience, and anecdotal observation points to higher levels of success and satisfaction and lower levels of stress and frustration as your communication skills improve.

With that backdrop, here are four ways you can improve almost all of your communications (presented roughly in the order I suggest you follow):

1. Learn how other people might hear, see, or interpret your messages

One concept that often surfaces in my communication workshops is that communication comes from the Latin word that also gives us the English word common. This observation implies that

communication makes ideas, thoughts, and concepts commonly understood — even if not agreed upon — between two or more people.

In order to make ideas common, it becomes important to understand both sides of the communication. You need to understand both how your idea sounds to the other person and what the other person means with the words they use. What you say might mean something other than what you intend to the other person. What the other person says might mean, to them, something other than what you hear.

I use and recommend the DISC model as a simple yet powerful tool for accomplishing this step. There are factors to consider other than communication style (e.g. – culture, gender, age, etc.). Still, it's a great place to start.

The goal of this “step” is to get a clear picture of how the differences between you and the other person might affect your communication efforts.

2. “Observe” your perspective

In the interest of full disclosure, I admit that I have not yet mastered this concept. It's really hard to do, and I'm not sure that any of us will ever truly perfect it. It's a good goal nonetheless.

Here's the idea, learn to step back from your first interpretation of a statement or behavior and look for how your perspective, or filter, might be affecting your response. There's more to this one step than I can effectively cover in this brief article, but David

Rock shares exercises you can do to build your skill in this area in *Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long*.

As you develop this skill, the next two steps become easier to do.

3. Listen actively

If the goal is to make an idea common, you must work to understand the other person's thinking before you can truly communicate. Active listening involves much more than just hearing the words. It involves total focus on what the other person is attempting to communicate. As you listen, fight the temptation to anticipate your response before the other person stops speaking. Listen with the intent to understand their perspective rather than with the intent to formulate your response.

4. Get and give feedback during the communication process

It's easy to say something and assume that the other person heard what you meant. It's also easy to hear something and to assume that you understood what the other person meant. Until you confirm mutual understanding, you will be operating on assumptions and interpretations rather than on facts.

Well phrased questions (combined with active listening) form the basis for effective feedback and clarity of communication. Here are five ways you can phrase a confirmation question:

- "Let me say back to you what I think you just said, so that I can be sure I understood you correctly..."

- “Please correct me if I am wrong. I understood you to say _____. Is that correct?”
- “If I hear you correctly, you are saying _____. Is that right?”
- “I hear you saying _____. Is that right?”
- “It sounds to me like you feel/think _____. Did I understand you correctly?”

Frankly, communication can be difficult. We do it virtually every day, and we often do not communicate as clearly as we think or intend. One of my favorite quotes on communication is by George Bernard Shaw: “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

I find that I have to frequently remind myself of key communication concepts in order to apply them with any consistency. For the next week, I encourage you to consciously focus on these four ways to improve your communication and watch the positive difference they will make in your communication effectiveness and the reduction they will make in your stress and frustration levels when you interact with others.

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