The Art of Communication

Communication is an important part of our lives. Good communication skills not only help us make friends, they can also enhance our work and daily life. As people come from different walks of life, they present different characters, background, values and cultures. This makes effective interpersonal communication an art form which is difficult to master.

Communication is an interactive process. Through verbal and non-verbal communication, people can express their emotions, share their thoughts and convey personal messages. We are not born with perfect communication skills. As a matter of fact, it is only through regular practice, self-reflection and continuous refinement that we can gradually grasp the secrets of this art. In general, communication skills can be divided into two main categories: verbal and non-verbal. Below is an introduction on non-verbal communication skills.

Elements of non-verbal communication

Interpersonal communication is not just limited to verbal communication. Apart from the verbal content of speech, other non-verbal components such as the tone and volume of one's voice, body language, grooming, physical distance between the conversing parties, etc. are also important media through which we express ourselves.

Tone & Volume

It is desirable to speak at a moderate pace and volume in normal daily conversations.

✶ Pace: Speaking too quickly or slowly will affect the listener's ability to process our message.

✶ Volume: We risk sounding insolent if we speak too loudly. On the other hand, speaking too softly may make us sound unsure of ourselves or hinder us from getting our message across.

✶ Tone: Good intonation can enhance voice quality and capture people's attention.
Body Language

This includes our facial expression, eye contact, posture and gesture.

- **Congruence**: Congruence between our facial expression and the content of our message is important as others may question our sincerity and genuineness if there is an incongruence.

- **Eye Contact**: Maintaining appropriate eye contact suggests respect and attentiveness while evading eye contact suggests shyness, nervousness, or secrecy. Prolonged eye contact, on the other hand, can be threatening and may lead to uneasiness. Alternatively, we can direct our gaze to various parts of the other person’s face, such as his or her mouth, nose, forehead, etc.

- **Posture**: Attend to our posture from time to time regardless of whether we are sitting or standing. Keeping our arms crossed suggests nervousness or detachment while spontaneous hand movement and a slightly forward leaning posture can convey interest in and acceptance of the other party.

- **Gestures**: Supplement our speech with appropriate body language and gestures but avoid distracting our audience with too much movements.

Grooming

- Our grooming, hairstyle and attire will directly affect the kind of impression we leave on others.

- Our fashion styles can also reveal a lot about ourselves, including our personalities, attitudes and preferences.

- It is therefore advisable to pay special attention to these aspects and to dress appropriately for different occasions.

Interpersonal Space

- Interpersonal space is an important aspect in communication which varies considerably across different cultures and nature of the relationships.

- We may feel a sense of uneasiness and distress when our personal space is being invaded.

- We should keep suitable distances in our daily encounters with others.

- It is therefore important to be watchful of others' body language and their comfort level so as to adjust our interpersonal space accordingly.

Characteristics of non-verbal communication

Whether we speak or not, our non-verbal behaviour always carries some meaning.

Non-verbal communication is more effective in reflecting our inner feelings and emotions. As a result, people tend to put more weight on non-verbal cues when there are incongruities between the verbal and non-verbal messages.

Non-verbal communication can be quite idiosyncratic and requires in-depth observation before true comprehension. It is important to clarify the underlying meaning when doubts arise to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Each culture has its own unique way of communicating nonverbally. It is essential to be open-minded and to try to understand, respect and appreciate cross-cultural differences in this regard.

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