

FACILITATORS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **Controlling Feelings and Emotions**
Emotions can distort the understanding we get from words. Hard as this is, try to control anger, resentment, excessive exuberance, laughter, etc.
- **Get Rid of or Avoid Distractions**
Avoid "fiddling" with paper, pencil, cigarette, pipe. Shut off the radio, sit out of a draft, close the window, draw the drapes, unloosen your shoes, etc. Get comfortable, but not too comfortable.
- **Have Visual Contact**
Look at the other person's face, mouth, eyes, hands. This helps the speaker to feel that you are listening, and helps you to communicate with the speaker.
- **Don't Talk**
Keep quiet when further talk would only add to the confusion.
- **Concentrate**
Consciously focus your attention on the speaker, his words, ideas, and feelings related to the message, purposely eliminate unrelated thoughts, ideas, and distractions.
- **Be Patient**
Do not interrupt the other person. Be courteous and give him time to say what he has to say.
- **Empathize**
Try to put yourself in the speaker's place; try to see it from his point of view, to understand it as he does.
- **Ask Questions**
Asking questions provides both you and the person speaking with important information necessary for effective communication. Questions are feedback to the speaker who then can give additional information and thereby improve his message.
- **Avoid Arguing Mentally**
To be thinking up a rebuttal or an argument sets up a barrier between speaker and listener and stops understanding.

- **Provide Feedback**
The listener gives feedback in several ways, such as looking attentive, eye contact, facial expressions, smiles, grunts, questions, and by asking for clarification.
- **Avoid Hasty Judgments**
These can result in misunderstandings and miscommunication. Don't assume that your understanding of a word or phrase is the same as the speaker's; that he didn't say what he meant; that he is distorting, lying, putting you on, or that he's unethical in trying to win you over to his point of view.
- **Listen**
The way a message is given, tone of voice, pitch, loudness, emotions, etc., is often more important than the actual words spoken. Avoid letting your reaction to the speaker influence your interpretation of his message. The ideas may be good even if you don't like the person or his appearance.
- **Create a Climate of Rapport**
Accept the other person totally. By giving the other person our undivided attention, we help them to feel accepted, worthwhile, important, on our level.
- **Avoid Putting Others "On the Spot"**
Demanding answers to specific questions, explanations, justifications, and embarrassing questions or any form of impoliteness may put others on the defensive.
- **Use Moderation Where Tensions and Trouble Are Likely**
Avoid the use of strong, emotion-laden words that inflame, antagonize, or irritate others.
- **Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say**
Think before you speak. Be sure what you are going to say is really what you think, feel, believe, or can stand behind and defend. Be honest, and use the clearest language and words to avoid ambiguous messages.

Kenneth E. Barber, Ph.D., Extension sociologist, Washington State University, Pullman.