

COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

A Course in Discussion and Presentation Skills

PURPOSE

To improve your abilities to communicate clearly, concisely, and persuasively with a wide range of listeners; to be able to “think on your feet” and express your ideas more successfully, especially under pressure (such as answering questions following a presentation or speaking with senior executives)

OVERVIEW

- Participants will self-evaluate and have others they respect evaluate their current communication skills using a checklist and via pre-interviews with the instructor
- Participate in a highly interactive one-day course focusing on gaps in: Audience sensitivity, thought organization, listening skills, confidence, “thinking on your feet” (as in Q&A), conciseness, style, and interpersonal skills
- Participants design and implement a template for reinforcing and tracking their progress after the course

Group course: one day, limited to 8 participants, with two months of weekly 10-minute phone-in practice sessions

Individual course: one half-day session face to face, 4 telephoned 1-hour sessions OR 2 2-hour face to face sessions, and 4 months total of weekly 10-minute practice sessions by phone

CONTENT

Adjusting to audience needs: strategies and systems for “reading” their concerns, needs, questions, and decisions to make and building information on those needs

Organizing information: 5 easy-to-remember patterns for organizing information, being concise and to-the-point, mind-mapping for rapid organization of ideas, persuasion strategies, reducing excessive (technical) detail, and making discussions and presentations more interactive

Listening skills: hearing implied meanings, psycholinguistic research on how to make your information more memorable, reducing interrupting, and paying more attention to what people are saying in discussions

Poise and professionalism: up-to-date strategies for calming “nerves” and conveying confidence via body language and facial expression; what to do with your hands, being expressive without being excessive or naïve-looking; conveying enthusiasm, openness, humor, and genuineness; relating to people from different backgrounds, and polish for interacting with senior executives

Speaking well: being concise and correct, making key points stand out verbally and vocally, projecting positive qualities using professional voice and speech patterns, having time to think while speaking by controlling speaking rate, projecting confidence and calm using your voice

Spontaneous speaking, including successful question and answer sessions: strategies for handling questions and comments diplomatically, concisely, and authoritatively; creating a final

impression that is positive, welcoming questions and comments, buying thinking time by switching from concrete to conceptual answers, diffusing tension and destructive challenges using humor and audience re-focusing,

Pre-work: Each person is required to bring a three to five minute sample of his or her most recent briefing. Each person will receive detailed and practical feedback for gradual improvement using the authentic briefing brought to class as a baseline as well as short subjects provided by the instructor. Long term support by email, tele-and video-conference is included for 5 months after course completion to reinforce new skills monthly and to be a resource for preparation and refinement of authentic presentations.

Principles governing course content and delivery are:

- Speaking style must be based upon genuine beliefs and knowledge and use of a comfortable interpersonal style. For example, a low-key person can be persuasive without being "turned into" a high-key person.
- Speakers improve dramatically when they have easier ways of forming and stating their ideas.
- Speakers have to program persuasiveness and extraordinary levels of conciseness to be effective with modern audiences.
- Clarity, timeliness, focus, personal warmth, and connection with listeners are the top priorities for speakers
- Participants learn best when they have large amounts of practice and feedback that are structured for incremental success.
- Participants will transfer new skills to the workplace when we practice authentic work-related speaking situations