

Guideposts for Success: Lesson Plans and Activities

Developed by the Institute for Educational Leadership

LESSON 6: THE ART OF COMMUNICATING...WITHOUT WORDS

AT-A-GLANCE

Developing and understanding how different communication styles are interpreted is an important step to developing positive social relationships with friends, family, teachers, co-workers and supervisors. Many of us automatically think about communication as the spoken (or signed, i.e., sign language) word. What young people often don't recognize is how their body language communicates things about themselves they may or may not realize.

ICEBREAKER

This is a short but very powerful icebreaker. Each student will need a blank 8 ½ x 11-inch sheet of paper.

1. Tell students the following: "Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you. Close your eyes and follow these directions. No peeking...and no questions."
2. Give the following directions, carrying them out yourself with your own sheet of paper and pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply.

"The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half. Now tear off the upper right-hand corner. Fold it in half again and tear off the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. Fold it in half again. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet."

3. After the tearing is complete, say something like "Now open your eyes, and let's see what you have. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look the same!"

Hold your sheet up for all to see. It is highly unlikely any sheet will match yours exactly. Observe the differences.

4. Ask the group why no one's paper matched yours. You will probably get responses like "You didn't let us ask questions!" or "Your directions could be interpreted in different ways."

ICEBREAKER DISCUSSION

Discuss the need for two-way communication at school, at home and in the workplace. Ask the group to work together (or in smaller groups) to create a definition of good communication. Include with this definition a list of the **responsibilities**—for being a good communicator and a good listener.

LESSON/ACTIVITY

This lesson will focus on the nonverbal form of communication. Recognizing and understanding

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nonverbal communication can be a plus in many social and workplace situations. This involves “reading” or interpreting the emotions revealed in a tone of voice, sensing how close to stand when talking to someone, facial expressions, assessing the mood of others. It is important for students to develop the basic skills to understand how nonverbal communication is “read” by others. Since most emotional messages between people are communicated nonverbally, by gesture or tone of voice, the inability to read such messages can cause difficulties in the workplace, at school or at home.

Discuss the following quote by Peter F. Drucker (a writer, consultant and teacher of management theory): “The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.” What is meant by this statement? Can you think of a situation where your body language revealed something about you that you didn’t actually “say” aloud? Use the following list to generate discussion:

“What are some different things we communicate just using...”

- Attentiveness and eye contact
- Facial expressions and body positioning
- Posture and space
- Handshake
- Clothing and accessories

Have students use magazines or computer generated clip art to create 2 side-by-side collages: One representing **positive** nonverbal communication on the job and the other **negative** nonverbal communication on the job. Discuss each collage—and generate a list of examples of nonverbal communication—and how it might be “read” by others. See if the group can come to consensus.

Conclude the lesson by making the following statement: Some studies¹ have shown that the WORDS you use have only a 7% impact on your communication; your TONE OF VOICE, another 38%. But your nonverbal BODY LANGUAGE has more than a 55% impact on the message you are trying to communicate. What does this tell you?

REFLECTION

Were you surprised to learn that *most* of what you communicate is nonverbal? What are some ways you know that you communicate nonverbally? What might you do to improve your nonverbal communication skills?

EXTENSION

Have students keep an observation log for one week, watching and examining the nonverbal

¹ Mehrabian, Albert and Morton Wiener, 1967, Decoding of inconsistent communications, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6:109-114

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communication of others. Generate, from these observations, ideas for helping students to better understand the importance of understanding and paying attention to their own nonverbal communication, as well as the nonverbal communication of others.

Ask students to work together to take pictures of each other demonstrating both positive and negative nonverbal communication skills—and discuss why the nonverbal communication may be interpreted in ways we didn't expect.