

PART ONE



STRATEGIC CASE

Sundown Bakery

When Carol Teinchek and Bruce Marshall first started Sundown Bakery, the business was fairly simple. Carol ran the shop up front, while Bruce ran the bakery and ordered supplies. When the business began to grow, Carol hired two part-time clerks to help out in the shop. Marina had moved to the country two years ago from El Salvador, and Kim was a newly arrived Korean working his way through college. Bruce hired Maurice, a French Canadian, as an assistant.

The ovens were soon running 24 hours a day, supervised by Maurice, who was now master baker, and two assistants on each of three shifts. Marina and Kim supervised the shop because Carol was usually too busy managing general sales distribution to spend much time with customers. Bruce still spent 3 or 4 hours a day in the bakery whenever he could get out of his office, but he spent most of that time coordinating production and solving problems with Maurice.

Within the next year, Sundown expanded from its original location, adding two new shops as well as two kiosks in local malls. Carol and Bruce hired a new operations manager, Hans Mikelson, formerly a regional manager of a national chain of coffee shops. Hans had plenty of new ideas about how to operate an expanding business: He launched a website, added an extensive range of drinks and meal items to the menu, and instituted two dress codes—one for all counter help and another for kitchen employees. He also put together an employee manual to save time orienting new employees. Hans announced all of these changes by memos, which store managers distributed to the employees.

Sundown's expanding size led to a change in the company. The family feeling that was strong when Sundown was a small operation was less noticeable. The new employees barely knew Bruce and Carol; as a result, there was less give-and-take of ideas between the owners and workers.

Hans' memos on the dress code and the employee manual created a crisis. Old-time employees were furious about receiving orders from "the bureaucrats," as management came to be called. Bruce and Carol recognized the problem and wanted to keep the lines of communication open, but they weren't sure how to do so. "I'm just a baker," Bruce confessed in exasperation. "I don't know how to run a big company."

Another set of challenges grew out of the changing character of the employees. In the original location alone, Sundown now employed workers from seven different countries. José, who was born in Brazil, confessed to Bruce that he felt uncomfortable being managed by Carol. "It's nothing personal," he said, "but where I come from, a man doesn't take orders from a woman." The Sundown employee profile was different in other ways. Two of the assistant bakers were openly gay; one of the sales clerks got around by wheelchair.

Carol, Bruce, and Hans know that good products alone aren't enough to guarantee Sundown Bakery's continuing success. They need to improve the quality of communication among the growing team who make and sell their products.

Basics of Business and Professional Communication

As you read the chapters in this unit, consider the following questions:

chapter 1

1. Apply the Communication Model (see Figure 1.1) to analyze Hens' communication to employees regarding the employee manual and uniforms. Consider the impact of the sender, message, decoding, feedback, context, and probable sources of noise. What elements seem to contribute most to the apparent lack of shared understanding?
2. Identify the changes in communication channels between employees and management as Sundown has grown. Suggest alternative communication strategies that might have reduced employee resentment. Explain why these channels could help improve management's communication about workplace changes. How might an organization's culture affect choice of communication channels?
3. Identify the instrumental, relational, and identity messages employees seem to have received from management as Sundown's business grew. What functions of downward communication do you notice? Can you find examples of upward and horizontal communication in this case study? How could Sundown improve its upward communication flow?

4. How have Sundown's formal and informal communication networks changed as the company expanded? In what ways have both the formal and informal networks contributed to Sundown's growing pains? In what ways can these networks be used to improve the relationships between management and employees?

chapter 2

1. How do changes in the demographic makeup of Sundown Bakery reflect transformation of the larger workforce as described in Communication in a Diverse Society on pp. 33–38?
2. Reflect on the six parts of the Customs and Behavior section, pp. 38–41. Cite a specific instance or predict the impact of three of these customs and behaviors in this workplace.
3. Consider the following hidden dimensions of culture as you describe the impact of culture on communication within the company: high- and low-context styles, individualism and collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/ femininity, and long-term orientation.
4. Using the guidelines on pp. 48–52 (Communicating across Diversity), what specific advice would you give to Sundown's management team about how to communicate most effectively in the face of the company's growth?



Chapter One

Communicating at Work

chapter outline

Communication and Career Success

The Nature of Communication

Communication Principles

Basics of the Communication Model

Communication Channels

Communicating in and beyond Organizations

Formal Communication Networks

Informal Communication Networks

Personal Networking

Ethical Dimensions of Communication

chapter objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

1. Explain the role of communication in career success, providing examples to support your claims.
2. Apply the key principles of communication, knowledge of the basic elements of the communication model, and considerations of effective communication channel use to a specific situation, showing how each one affects the outcome of the interaction.
3. Describe how formal and informal communication networks operate in a given situation in your career field; then create a strategic plan of personal networking to accomplish your goals within an organization.
4. Apply the concepts of ethical communication discussed here to one or more ethically challenging situations.

• Communication and Career Success

The next time you look for job postings online, read the help wanted section of the newspaper, or check out internship opportunities at your college's career services office, look a little closer. No matter what kind of position you're seeking—from entry-level jobs to highly technical professional positions—chances are you will see “excellent communication skills” listed as a job requirement.

Regardless of occupation, people spend a staggering amount of time communicating on the job. Engineers spend most of their professional lives speaking and listening, mostly in one-to-one and small group settings.¹ Accountants may crunch numbers, but they also need to communicate effectively to serve their clients. That's why CPAs and the firms that hire them consistently cite effective communication as essential for career success.² One study based on responses from more than 1,000 employees at Fortune 1000 companies found that workers send and receive an average of 178 messages each day via telephone, e-mail, faxes, text messages, blogs, instant messages, and face-to-face communication.³ Some experts have estimated that the

average business executive spends 75 to 80 percent of his or her time communicating—more than 45 minutes of every hour.⁴

When it comes to communication, quality matters in virtually every career,⁵ not just those traditionally regarded as people oriented. On-the-job communication skills can even make the difference between life and death. The Los Angeles Police Department cited “bad communication” among the most common reasons for errors in shooting by its officers.⁶ Communication skills are essential for doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals too.⁷ Researchers discovered that “poor communication” was the root of more than 60 percent of reported medical errors—including death, serious physical injury, and psychological trauma.⁸ A survey by a major hospital accreditation group found communication woes to be among the leading causes of medical errors, which cause as many as 98,000 deaths each year.⁹ Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and elsewhere revealed a significant difference between the communication skills of physicians who had no malpractice claims against them and doctors with previous claims.¹⁰

Careers in Communication

Communication plays an important role in every job, but it is the primary focus of many careers. While a degree in communication may not be mandatory for jobs like these, academic study of the field is excellent preparation.

Advertising/Marketing: advertising or marketing specialist, copywriter, account executive, sales manager, media planner, media buyer, creative director, media sales representative, sales and marketing manager, media manager.

Electronic Media/Radio-Television/

Broadcasting: program director, community relations director, film editor, news director, reporter, sales associate/manager, web designer, audience/market researcher, media buyer, announcer/news anchor, public relations manager, comedy writer, casting director, producer, business manager, floor manager, talk show host.

Health Communication: health educator, school health care administrator, medical grant writer, clinic public relations director, health communication analyst, medical training supervisor, communication manager for federal health agencies, medical center publications editor, hospice manager, health care counselor/health facility fundraiser.

Journalism (Print or Electronic): reporter, editor, newscaster, copywriter, script writer, publisher, news service researcher, technical writer, acquisitions editor, media interviewer.

New Media and Technology: digital graphic designer, web publisher, e-zine writer and editor, game designer, app developer, social media marketing specialist, website designer and administrator, new media researcher.

Organizational Communication: human resources/training/internal communication specialist, meeting manager, labor negotiator, recruiter, industrial media producer/director, technical writer, community/government affairs coordinator, research/knowledge manager.

Political Communication: press secretary, speech writer, political campaign consultant, elected official, political reporter, diplomat, lobbyist, lawyer, legislative assistant, communication director.

Public Relations: publicity manager, press agent, lobbyist, public affairs specialist, development officer, fundraiser, membership recruiter, sales manager, media analyst, media planner, creative director, audience analyst, community relations specialist, internal communications director, public opinion researcher.

Risk and Crisis Communication: public relations officer, corporate spokesperson, corporate trainer, communication consultant, spokesperson for government agencies.

Source: Adapted from National Communication Association. (2011). *Pathways to communication careers in the 21st century*. Washington, DC: National Communication Association.

Communication skills are essential to personal career success too. Technical people with good communication skills earn more, and those who are weak communicators suffer.¹¹ A survey of corporate recruiters revealed that good communication skills and the ability to work with others are the main factors contributing to job success. People with MBAs reported that the skills they valued most were the ability to work with others, listening skills, the ability to influence others, and communicating with diplomacy and tact.¹² William Schaffer, international business development manager for computer giant Sun Microsystems, made the point emphatically: “If there’s one skill that’s required for success in this industry, it’s communication skills.”¹³ Executive coach and pharmaceutical recruiter Jim Richman echoes this sentiment: “If I give any advice, it is that you can never do enough training around your overall communication skills.”¹⁴

Table 1-1 Top Qualities/Skills Employers Want

1. Ability to work in a team
2. Verbal communication skills
3. Ability to make decisions and problem solve
4. Ability to obtain and process information
5. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work

Source: Reprinted from *Job Outlook 2011*, from JobWeb (<http://www.jobweb.com>), with permission of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, copyright holder.

Table 1-1 summarizes the results of one annual survey in which employers list the skills and qualities for their ideal candidate. Communication skills always are near the top of the list.¹⁵

Many people don't appreciate the crucial role communication plays in career success. One survey revealed that students were half as likely as employers to recognize the role communication skills play in becoming an effective professional.¹⁶ Just as disturbing was the finding that students are more likely than employers to believe they are good communicators. In other words, many students underestimate the importance of good communication while overestimating their own abilities. This is not a recipe for success.

Because communication skills are an essential ingredient in professional and organizational accomplishment, this book is dedicated to helping you hone your talents in this important area.

• The Nature of Communication

Communication looks simple and almost effortless, especially when it goes smoothly. But every communicative exchange is affected by principles that aren't always apparent. Understanding this process better can help you make strategic choices that help achieve both personal and organizational goals.

Communication Principles

A more sophisticated understanding of how communication operates begins with some fundamental principles.

Communication Is Unavoidable A fundamental axiom of communication is "One cannot not communicate."¹⁷ As you will learn in Chapter 4, facial expression, posture, gesture, clothing, and a host of other behaviors offer cues about our attitudes. The impossibility of not communicating means we send messages even by our absence. Failing to show up at an event or leaving the room suggests meanings to others. Because communication is unavoidable, it is essential to consider the unintentional messages you send.



Communication Is Strategic Virtually all communication is aimed at achieving goals. On the job, the most obvious type is what scholars call **instrumental communication**—messages aimed at accomplishing the task at hand. Your manager is communicating instrumentally when she says, “I need that report by noon,” and you are pursuing instrumental goals when you ask, “How long does it need to be?” People don’t always state their instrumental goals outright. Saying, “Wow—look at the time!” could be code for “I’d like to wrap up this conversation.” And in a negotiation, your “final offer” may actually be a bargaining ploy to get a better deal.

A second set of goals involves **relational communication**—messages that shape and reflect the way people regard one another. Building positive relationships isn’t just about being sociable; a positive climate helps achieve instrumental goals. Conversely, a negative relationship can make it difficult, or even impossible, to accomplish them.

Virtually all messages contain both instrumental and relational dimensions. When a customer service rep asks, “How can I help you?” the instrumental nature of this question is obvious. But the *way* the question is asked shapes the tenor of the relationship between the rep and customer—rushed or deliberate, sincere or phony, friendly or unfriendly.¹⁸

A third, less obvious reason we communicate involves **identity management**, which is the practice of presenting yourself in ways that produce a preferred image and distinctive sense of self. To understand this concept, take a moment to make a list of 10 words or phrases that describe the way you would like others to see you on the job. Your list probably includes terms such as *competent*, *trustworthy*, and *efficient*. (Be sure to complete your own list before reading on.) Taken together, the attributes on this list (and many others) make up the professional identity you want to create. Next, think about the ways you communicate, both verbally and nonverbally, to get others to accept your identity. If being calm under pressure is part of your preferred identity, what do you say or do to project that quality? If you want others to see you as knowledgeable, how do you communicate to create that impression?

As these examples show, communication is often *strategic*; we craft messages to achieve instrumental, relational, and identity goals. Sometimes our strategizing operates subconsciously. When meeting a new person, you probably don’t think, “Must look confident and friendly! Firm handshake! Direct eye contact!” At other times, though, crafting a thoughtful strategy to achieve your goals can boost the odds you will succeed.

A major focus of this book is to suggest communication strategies you can use to achieve your goals and the goals of the organizations with which you’re involved. Many of these strategies will focus on specific work-related contexts, such as interviews, meetings, and presentations. Others will be useful in virtually every professional context where you want to enhance your professional identity, manage relationships, and get the job at hand done most effectively.

At first, the notion of strategic communication might seem unethical. But communicating purposefully isn’t necessarily dishonest. The guidelines on pp. 25–26 show that it’s possible to be strategic while still respecting others’ rights and needs.

Communication Is Irreversible At one time or another, everybody has wished they could take back words they regretted uttering. Unfortunately, this isn’t possible. Our words and deeds are recorded in others’ memories, and we can’t erase them. As the old saying goes, people may forgive, but they don’t forget. In fact, often the more vigorously you try to erase an act, the more vividly it stands out.

Communication Is a Process It isn’t accurate to talk about an “act” of communication as if sending or receiving a message were an isolated event. Rather, every

Derogatory E-mails Lead to Firings

Three employees of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission learned the hard way that digital gossip can be costly. They were fired after supervisors found they had used the state's e-mail system to disparage and ridicule coworkers. The culprits referred to colleagues by offensive nicknames, such as Monster, Psycho, Stoned Intern, Roid Rage, Extreme Makeover, Where's My Car?, and Albino. A representative message read, "Where's My Car and Psycho are talking about food—a match made in stoner/fatty heaven!"

The workers called their e-mails harmless office chatter. "It was just talk, water cooler chat," one protested. An administrative law judge disagreed, characterizing their messages as "misconduct" that disqualified them for unemployment insurance benefits.

Source: Foley, R. J. (2011, August 22). Email exchanges gets three Iowa civil rights investigators fired. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://thegazette.com/2011/08/22/email-exchanges-get-three-iowa-civil-rights-investigators-fired>

communication event needs to be examined as part of its communication context. Suppose, for example, your boss responds to your request for a raise by saying, "I was going to ask you to take a *cut* in pay!" How would you react? The answer probably depends on several factors: Is your boss a joker or a serious person? How does the comment fit into the history of your relationship—have your boss's remarks been critical or supportive in the past? How does the message fit with ones you have received from other people? What mood are you in today? All these questions show that the meaning of a message depends in part on what has happened before the message. Each message is part of a process: It doesn't occur in isolation.

Communication Is Not a Panacea Although communication can smooth out the bumps and straighten the road to success, it won't always get you what you want. Misunderstandings and ill feelings can arise even when people communicate carefully,¹⁹ and they can increase even more dramatically when people communicate badly. This helps explain why some problems grow worse the longer they are discussed. Even effective communication won't solve all problems. There are some situations in which the parties understand one another perfectly and still disagree. These limitations are important to understand as you begin to study communication on the job. Boosting your communication skills can increase your effectiveness, but it isn't a cure-all.

Basics of the Communication Model

No matter the setting or the number of people involved, all communication consists of the same elements. Understanding them can help explain what happens when one person tries to express an idea to others. It can also offer clues about why some attempts succeed and others fail.

The communication process begins with a **sender**, the person who transmits a **message**.²⁰ Some messages are deliberate, while others (such as sighs and yawns) may be unintentional. The sender must choose certain words or nonverbal methods to send an intentional message. This activity is called **encoding**. The **channel** (sometimes called the *medium*) is the method used to deliver a message. You will read much more about channel in the next section.

Even when a message gets to its intended receiver intact, there's no guarantee it will be understood as the sender intended it to be.²¹ The **receiver** must still attach meaning to

the words or behavior. Receivers don't just absorb messages like passive sponges. Instead, they actively interpret and respond to them. The process of a receiver attaching meaning to a message is called **decoding**.

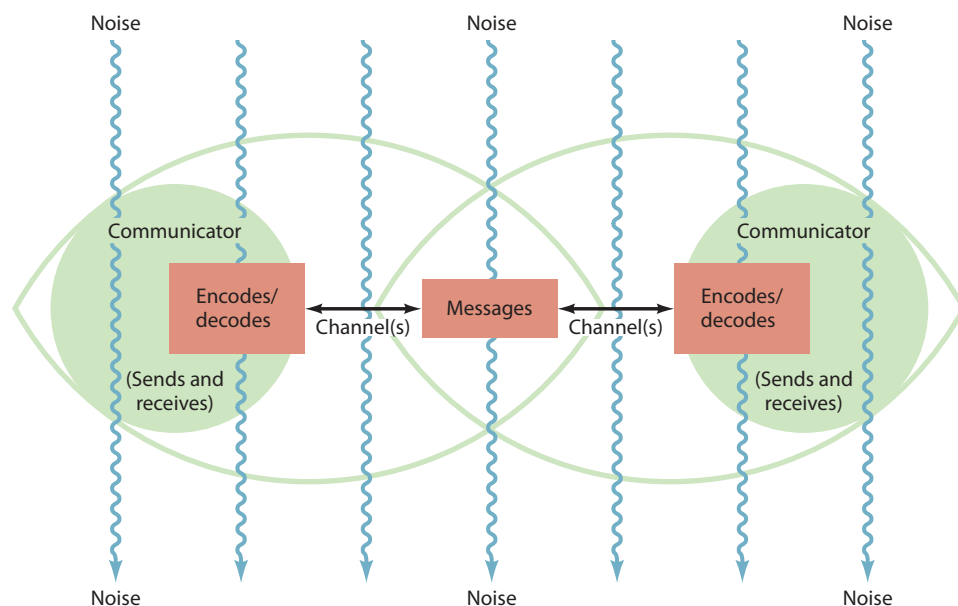
Misunderstandings often arise because messages can be decoded in more than one way. Consider a situation when a customer responds to a slip-up by saying, "Don't worry about it." Perhaps the literal statement is accurate: "There's absolutely no need to worry." Or perhaps the customer means, "It isn't perfect, but I can tolerate the mistake." On the other hand, the customer could be annoyed but doesn't want to say bluntly, "I'm really unhappy." In the coming chapters, you'll learn a variety of strategies for reaching a shared understanding in these situations.

The receiver's discernible response to a sender's message is called **feedback**. Some feedback is nonverbal—smiles, sighs, and so on. Sometimes it is oral, as when you react to a colleague's ideas with questions or comments. Feedback can also be written, as when you respond by writing your coworker an e-mail. In many cases, no message can be a type of feedback. Failure to answer a letter or to return a phone call can suggest how the noncommunicative person feels about the sender.

Even though we've described sending and receiving as discrete roles, communication is actually a two-way process. Especially when communication is instantaneous—in face-to-face settings, phone conversations, and online chat—people are simultaneously senders and receivers. While you're pitching an idea to your manager (sending a message), she is receiving information. But at the same time, she is sending verbal and nonverbal feedback for you to interpret. When she voices a concern about part of your idea and you respond defensively, both of you are sending and receiving. Because sending and receiving are simultaneous and connected, these two roles are combined into the "communicator" positions represented on both sides of the model pictured in Figure 1.1 below.

Once you understand that receiving and sending are simultaneous and connected, you start to recognize that successful communication isn't something active senders do to passive receivers. Rather, it's a collaborative process in which the participants create a

FIGURE 1.1
Communication
Model



shared understanding through the exchange of messages. In other words, communication isn't something we do *to* others; it's a process we do *with* them. An effective way to build shared meaning is to practice other-orientation—that is, trying to understand the other person's viewpoint, whether or not we agree with it. Feedback helps us in this process of building shared meaning.

One of the greatest barriers to effective communication is **noise**—factors that interfere with the exchange of messages. The most obvious type of noise is *environmental*—for example, the babble of voices in the next room, the annoying ring of someone's cell phone in a meeting, or a smelly cigar. A second type of noise is *physiological*—hearing disorders, illnesses, disabilities, and other factors all make it difficult to send or receive messages. To appreciate the impact of physiological noise, recall how hard it is to process messages when you're recovering from a late-night study session or have a headache. The third type of noise is *psychological*—forces within the sender or receiver that interfere with understanding, such as egotism, defensiveness, assumptions, stereotypes, biases, prejudices, hostility, preoccupation, and fear. If you were thinking strategically about communicating with someone at work, what steps could you take to reduce noise in your environment before delivering your message?

Communication Channels

As a business communicator, the channel you choose to deliver a message can have a big influence on your effectiveness. Should you express your ideas in a phone call? Put them into a text message or e-mail? Send them via fax or in hard copy? Or should you express yourself in person? Deciding which communication channel to use isn't a trivial matter; communication researchers have studied extensively the factors that lead to good channel choice.²² As you choose the best channel, you should consider several factors.

Consider Channel Characteristics New technologies have given businesspeople a wider range of choices for communication than ever before. It wasn't that long ago when the choices were in-person, telephone, or written memo. But today, there also are e-mail messages, voice mail, faxes, instant messaging, video conferencing, web conferencing, Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, pagers, texting, and more. One way to start evaluating these choices is to consider each channel's different characteristics and how those characteristics match your communication goals.

- **Richness.** Richness refers to the amount of information available in a given channel: facial expression, tone of voice, eye and body movement. In rich channels—such as face-to-face settings and, to a lesser extent, in video chats—a wide array of nonverbal cues help you better understand another person. Is the customer in a hurry? Is your boss angry? Is a colleague joking or serious? Seeing and hearing others can help you answer questions like these. In contrast, lean channels have much less information. So while a lean e-mail channel is good for exchanging information efficiently, it isn't as effective when factors such as tone and emotion are important. Even emoticons like the smiley face haven't prevented e-mail misunderstandings.²³
- **Speed.** Speed of the channel refers to how quickly the exchange of messages occurs. High-speed or instantaneous channels are called **synchronous communication**. These include face-to-face conversations, video chat, and telephone conversations. A key benefit of synchronous channels is that there's no time lag between the transmission and reception of messages, so they permit immediate feedback. You can

respond to questions as soon as they arise and rephrase or elaborate as necessary. If you need a price quote *now* or if you need to discuss a complex idea that will need a lot of elaboration, a high-speed channel is probably the best choice. But high-speed, synchronous communication isn't always desirable. Another option is **asynchronous communication**. Asynchronous channels include e-mail, interoffice memos, and voice mail. In these “low-speed” channels there is a lag between the transmission and reception of messages. These channels can be effective for less urgent requests. In addition, if you want to avoid a knee-jerk reaction and encourage careful thought, you might be better off choosing an asynchronous method to deliver your message.

- *Control*. Control refers to the degree to which you can manage the communication process. Of course, because communication is a two-way process, you can never have complete control. However, different channels offer different types of control. In written channels (like writing an e-mail), you can have more control over how you encode a message because you will be able to write, proofread, and edit it as many times as you need until you get it exactly the way you want. If you have something highly sensitive to say, this might be a good channel to choose. But there are also some trade-offs to this channel; even though you might spend hours drafting a memo, letter, or report, the recipient may scan it superficially or not read it at all. In contrast, in a face-to-face channel, you have much more control over the receiver's attention. You can reduce noise, interpret nonverbal signals of understanding, or even explicitly ask the sender to pay more attention to your message.

Consider the Desired Tone of Your Message In general, oral communication is best for messages that require a personal dimension. One corporate manager, whose company spends more than \$4 million annually on employee travel, makes the case for face-to-face contact: “Nothing takes the place of a handshake, going to lunch, seeing their eyes.”²⁴ Oral channels are also best for ideas that have a strong need for visual support—demonstration, photos or slides, and so on. Spoken communication is also especially useful when there is a need for immediate feedback, such as question-and-answer sessions or a quick reply to your ideas.

Written communication works well when you want to create a relatively formal tone. Writing is almost always the best medium when you must choose your words carefully. Writing is also better than speaking when you want to convey complicated ideas likely to require much study and thought by the receiver. It's also smart to put your message in writing when you want it to be the final word, with no feedback or discussion. Finally, writing is best for *any* message if you want a record to exist. In business and the professions, sending confirming letters and e-mails is common practice, as is keeping meeting minutes. These steps guarantee that what is said will be a matter of record, useful in case of later misunderstandings or disputes and in case anyone wants to review the history of an issue. Handwritten notes of thanks or sympathy express thoughtfulness and add a personal touch that electronic messages lose.

Consider the Organization's Culture Besides message-related considerations, the culture of the organization in which you work may favor some communication channels over others.²⁵ For example, Microsoft Corporation is so e-mail intensive that some voice mail greetings include the directive, “If you're from Microsoft, please try to send electronic mail.” In other organizations, voice mail is the preferred channel. Kirk Froggatt, a vice president at Silicon Graphics, offers one explanation: “There's something fundamentally more personal about voice mail. You can get the tone of voice, the

The Virtues of Going Offline

Today's array of communication technologies makes it possible to be connected to others virtually all the time. This connectivity has led to a dramatic growth in teleworking and telecommuting—flexible work arrangements in which employees do their jobs outside the office. Along with their benefits, the technologies that keep workers connected have a downside. When your boss, colleagues, and customers can reach you any time, you can become too distracted to tackle necessary parts of your job.

Communication researchers have discovered that remote workers have developed two strategies for reducing contact and thereby increasing their

efficiency.²⁶ The first simply involved disconnecting from time to time: logging off the computer, forwarding the phone call to voice mail, or simply ignoring incoming messages. The researchers labeled the second strategy *dissimulation*. Teleworkers discourage contact by disguising their activities, for example, changing their instant message status to “in a meeting” or posting a fake “out of the office” message online.

It's important to note that these strategies weren't typically used to avoid work but to get more done. These findings show that too much connectivity is similar to many aspects of life; more isn't always better.

passion. People like that.”²⁷ A recent study even indicated that employees who followed corporate norms for e-mail and instant messaging received higher performance evaluations.²⁸ Along with an organization's overall preference for some channels, it's important to consider the preferences of departments or even individuals. For example, the computer support staff members in some organizations respond to e-mails, while in other companies a phone call to the help desk is the best way to get a quick response. And, if you know a coworker or your boss responds only to face-to-face reminders, your best bet is to use that approach.

Consider Using Multiple Channels In some cases, it's wise to send a message using more than one channel. For example, you could:

- Distribute a written text or outline that parallels your presentation.
- Follow a letter, fax, or e-mail message with a phone call, or call first and then write.
- Send a report or proposal and then make appointments with your readers to discuss it.

This redundancy capitalizes on the diverse strengths of each channel and boosts the odds of getting your desired message across. One study revealed that following-up a face-to-face exchange with an e-mail that included supplemental information was more persuasive than the single channel approach. The dual-channel approach also enhanced the sender's credibility.²⁹

Sometimes channel selection involves trade-offs. For example, face-to-face communication is rich, fast, and allows you to have a lot of control over the receiver's attention. It also has the potential to create personal bonds that are more difficult to create in other types of communication. On the other hand, personal contacts can be difficult to schedule, even when people work in the same building. A cross-town trip for a half-hour meeting can take most of the morning or afternoon.

Ultimately, the question isn't which communication channel to use, but when to use each one most effectively.³⁰ Knowing how to choose the optimal channel can have a strong impact on your career. In one survey, managers who were identified as “media

Table 1-2

Considerations in Choosing a Communication Channel

	Richness	Speed	Control over Message	Control over Attention	Tone	Level of Detail
Face-to-Face	High	Synchronous	Low	High	Personal	Moderate
Telephone Teleconferencing and Videoconferencing	Moderate	Synchronous	Low	Moderate	Personal	Moderate
Voice Mail	Moderate	Asynchronous	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low
E-mail	Low	Asynchronous	High	Low	Impersonal-Moderate	High
Instant Messaging	Low	Asynchronous but potentially quick	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Text Messaging	Low	Asynchronous but potentially quick	High	Low	Impersonal-Moderate	Low
Hard Copy (e.g., handwritten or typed message)	Low	Asynchronous	High	Low	Depends on writer's style	High

sensitive” — those who matched the channel to the message — were almost twice as likely to receive top ratings in their performance reviews when compared with less-media-sensitive peers.³¹ Table 1-2 presents some guidelines that will help you decide how to deliver your message most effectively.

• Communicating in and beyond Organizations

For most of us, work is collaborative. It's the rare person who creates, markets, and sells goods or services alone. Whether the people we work with are in adjacent cubicles or on the other side of the planet, we are members of **communication networks** — patterns of contact created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space.³² Two kinds of networks exist: formal and informal.

Formal Communication Networks

Formal communication networks are systems designed by management to dictate who should talk to whom to get a job done. In small organizations, networks are so simple they may hardly be noticeable. In larger organizations, they become more intricate. The most common way of describing formal communication networks is with **organizational charts** like the one in Figure 1.2. Organizational charts are more than a bureaucrat's toy; they provide a clear guideline of who is responsible for a given task and which employees are responsible for others' performance. They also depict optimal flows of communication, including downward, upward, and horizontal communication.

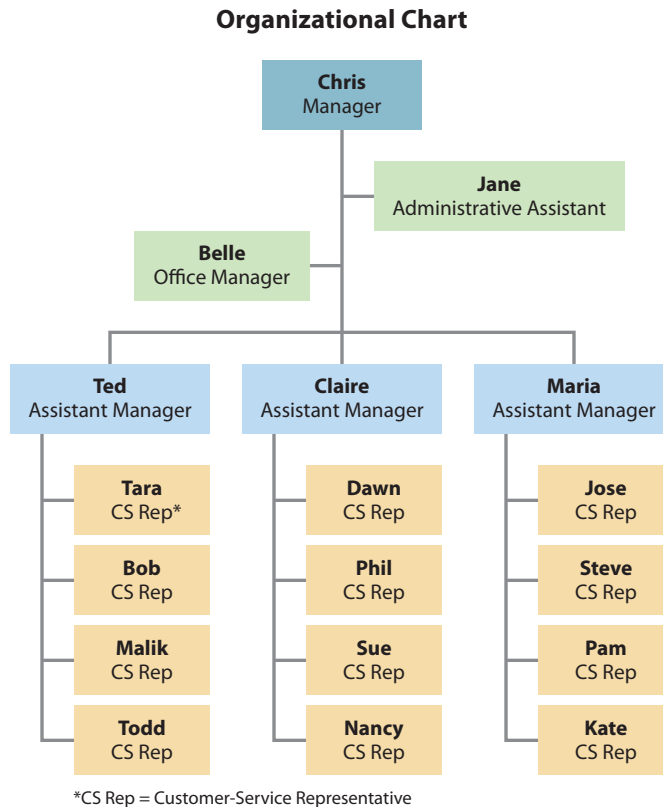


FIGURE 1.2
A Formal
Communication
Network

Downward Communication **Downward communication** occurs whenever superiors initiate messages to their subordinates. There are several types of downward communication:

- *Job instructions:* “Bring in receipts for items under \$20 that you pay for with cash. Anything over \$20, charge to the company credit card.”
- *Job rationale:* “We rotate the stock like that so the customers won’t wind up with outdated merchandise.”
- *Feedback:* “Backing up the files on your flash drive was a great idea. That saved us a lot of grief when the laptop didn’t work.”
- *Indoctrination:* “People can buy the stuff we sell at other places, but we can bring them in here by giving them what they want quickly and pleasantly. If we do that, we’ll all come out ahead.”

Most managers would agree—at least in principle—that downward communication is important. It’s hard to argue with the need for giving instructions, describing procedures, explaining rationale, and so on. Like their bosses, employees recognize the importance of downward communication. A study at General Electric (GE) revealed that “clear communication between boss and worker” was the most important factor in job satisfaction for most people. GE was so impressed with the findings of this study it launched a program to encourage managers to communicate more, and more directly, with their employees, including holding informal meetings to encourage interaction.³³

Getting Recognized by Your Bosses

According to Muriel Solomon, “The big secret to getting recognized is to give creative thinking a priority.” She and other career advisers recommend you can showcase your talent, create interest in your work, and display your potential in several ways:

- **Present proposals to your boss.** Learn the history of a challenge, develop a specific plan that shows creativity and understanding of the company’s needs. Don’t wait for someone to recognize you or choose you for a prime assignment.
- **Volunteer for committees, to chair a committee, or to sponsor a workshop, hearing, or sports event.** Create opportunities to enlarge your working relationships with people at many levels of your organization. Prepare concise summaries and submit reports to your boss.
- **Get your thoughts printed.** Contribute quality writing to company publications, department

newsletters, or association or professional journals. Distribute copies to your manager, and post on bulletin boards and company blogs.

- **Use thoughtful gestures to build bridges.** Devote 5 minutes a day to raising your visibility by thanking people who worked on your project, calling or sending thank-you notes to the supervisors of those who helped you (with a blind copy to the one whose help you received), and feeding your gratitude into the grapevine.
- **Be ready to share a story about your accomplishments.** Without bragging, be prepared to weave your accomplishments (be sure to include recent ones) into an interesting story you can tell whenever the opportunity arises: “Something like that happened to us last week. . . .”

Source: Klais, P. (2007). *The hard truth about soft skills*. New York, NY: Collins Business; Solomon, M. (1993). *Getting praised, raised and recognized*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

The desire for feedback is probably so strong among most employees because supervisors rarely provide enough of it. As two leading researchers put it: “The frequent complaint . . . by the individual is that he [sic] does not know where he stands with his superiors.”³⁴ Many companies do take a more enlightened approach to feedback. Ed Carlson, former president of United Airlines, is generally credited with turning the company from a loser into a winner during his tenure. Part of his success was due to keeping United’s employees—all of them—aware of how the company was doing. “Nothing is worse for morale than a lack of information down in the ranks,” he said. “I call it NETMA—Nobody Ever Tells Me Anything—and I have tried hard to minimize that problem.”³⁵ True to his word, Carlson passed along to the field staff information on United’s operations that was previously considered too important to circulate.

Upward Communication Messages flowing from subordinates to superiors are labeled **upward communication**. Virtually every organization *claims* to seek upward messages, but many aren’t as open to employee opinions as they claim. In some organizations, questioning the boss can be a recipe for professional suicide. “The disconnect between rhetoric and reality is why Scott Adams [creator of the ‘Dilbert’ comic strip] is a millionaire,” says management expert Warren Bennis.³⁶

Businesses that really are open to upward communication can profit from the opinions of employees.³⁷ Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, the largest retailer in the United States, claimed that “our best ideas come from clerks and stockboys.”³⁸ Industry observers credit the dramatic turnaround of Mattel Corporation to CEO John Aberman’s openness to employee suggestions.³⁹ Upward communication can convey four types of messages:⁴⁰

- *What subordinates are doing:* “We’ll have that job done by closing time today.”
- *Unsolved work problems:* “We’re still having trouble with the air conditioner in the accounting office.”
- *Suggestions for improvement:* “I think I’ve figured a way to give people the vacation schedules they want and still keep our staffing up.” As the Career Tip on p. 16 suggests, getting recognized by your boss can pave the way to career advancement.
- *How subordinates feel about each other and the job:* “I’m having a hard time working with Louie. He seems to think I’m mad at him.” Or, “I’m getting frustrated. I’ve been in the same job for over a year now, and I’d like more responsibility.”

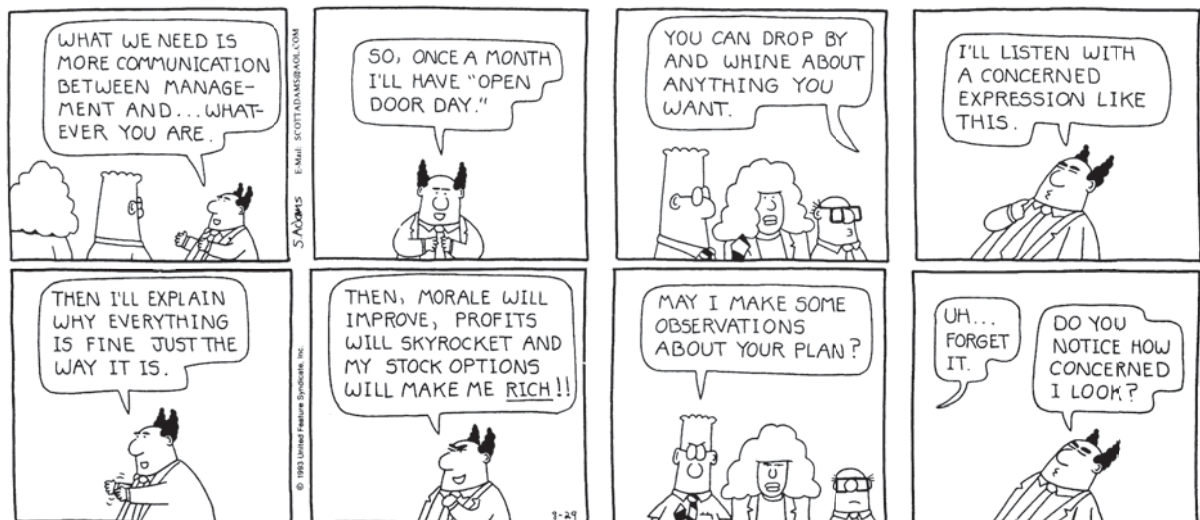
These messages can benefit both subordinates and superiors, and this explains why the most satisfied employees feel free to express dissent to their bosses.⁴¹ Bennis emphasizes the critical role upward communication plays in the success of an organization:

The longer I study effective leaders, the more I am convinced of the underappreciated importance of effective followers. What makes a good follower? The single most important characteristic may well be a willingness to tell the truth. In a world of growing complexity, leaders are increasingly dependent on their subordinates for good information, whether the leaders want to or not. Followers who tell the truth, and leaders who listen, are an unbeatable combination.⁴²

Despite its importance, upward communication isn’t always easy. Being frank with superiors can be both important and risky, especially when the news isn’t what the boss wants to hear.⁴³ One executive gives an example:

In my first C.E.O. job, a young woman who worked for me walked in one day and said, “Do you know that the gossip in the office is that the way for a woman to get ahead is to wear frilly spring dresses?” And I just looked at her and asked, “Where did this come from?” She said, “Well, you said, ‘pretty dress’ to four women who happened to be dressed that way. And so now it’s considered policy.”⁴⁴

Some organizations have developed systems to promote upward communication in the face of potential challenges. Pillsbury Corporation employees can voice their messages on an anonymous voice mail system. An independent company creates transcripts of all calls and forwards them to Pillsbury’s CEO.⁴⁵



Most of the responsibility for improving upward communication rests with managers. One recent study showed the likelihood of reporting bad news was highest when employees trusted supervisors and when there was a history in the organization of leaders resolving problems.⁴⁶ They can begin the process by announcing their willingness to hear from subordinates. A number of vehicles facilitate upward messages: an open-door policy, grievance procedures, periodic interviews, group meetings, and the suggestion box, to name a few. Formal channels aren't the only way to promote upward messages. Informal contacts can often be most effective. Chats during breaks, in the elevator, or at social gatherings can sometimes tell more than planned sessions. But no method will be effective unless a manager is sincerely interested in hearing from subordinates and genuinely values their ideas. Just talking about this isn't enough. Employees have to see evidence of a willingness to hear upward messages—both good and bad—before they will really open up.

Horizontal Communication A third type of organizational interaction is **horizontal communication** (sometimes called *lateral communication*). It consists of messages between members of an organization with equal power.⁴⁷ The most obvious type of horizontal communication goes on between members of the same division of an organization: office workers in the same department, coworkers on a construction project, and so on. In other cases, lateral communication occurs between people from different areas: accounting calls maintenance to get a machine repaired, hospital admissions calls intensive care to reserve a bed, and so on. Horizontal communication serves five purposes:⁴⁸

- *Task coordination*: “Let’s get together this afternoon and set up a production schedule.”
- *Problem solving*: “It takes three days for my department to get reports from yours. How can we speed things up?”
- *Sharing information*: “I just found out a big convention is coming to town next week, so we ought to get ready for lots of business.”
- *Conflict resolution*: “I’ve heard you were complaining about my work to the boss. If you’re not happy, I wish you would tell me first.”
- *Building rapport*: “I appreciate the way you got that rush job done on time. I’d like to say thanks by buying you lunch.”

Research suggests that people in most organizations communicate horizontally, but the reasons for doing so in high-performing groups are different from those in less effective ones.⁴⁹ Low-performing groups are likely to reach out to different parts of the organization to get information on how to follow existing procedures. For example, an engineer might contact the purchasing department to check on the status of an equipment order. By contrast, lateral contacts in high-performing organizations are used to get the information needed to solve complex and difficult work problems. For instance, before starting design work on a new product, the same engineer might contact the sales manager to find out what features customers want most. Top-performing organizations encourage people from different areas to get together and share ideas. At Hewlett-Packard, Worldwide Personnel Manager Barbara Waugh and her colleagues spent five years improving horizontal communication. “My role is to create mirrors that show the whole what



the parts are doing—through coffee talks and small meetings, through building a network, through bringing people together who have similar or complementary ideas.”⁵⁰

Despite the importance of good horizontal communication, several forces work to discourage communication between peers.⁵¹ *Rivalry* is one. People who feel threatened by one another aren’t likely to be cooperative. The threat can come from competition for a promotion, raise, or other scarce resource. Sometimes rivalry occurs over an informal role. For example, two office comedians might feel threatened each time the other gets a laugh; that could inhibit their cooperation. Another challenge is the *specialization* that makes it hard for people with different technical specialties to understand one another. *Information overload* can also discourage employees from reaching out to others in different areas, and a simple *lack of motivation* is another problem. Finally, *physical barriers*, such as having offices scattered throughout different buildings, can interfere with horizontal connections.

Informal Communication Networks

So far, we have focused on networks within organizations that are created by management. Alongside the formal networks, every organization also has **informal communication networks**—patterns of interaction based on friendships, shared personal or career interests, and proximity. One business writer described the value of informal networks:

A firm’s organizational chart will tell you about authority. It doesn’t always show how things get done or created. You know the rules, but you don’t know the ropes. For that, you need a map to the network, the corresponding informal structure that is usually invisible.⁵²

Informal relationships within organizations operate in ways that have little to do with the formal relationships laid out in organizational charts.⁵³ Figure 1.3 shows how the actual flow of information in one firm is quite different from its formal structure. And beyond any sort of organizational connection, people are connected with one another through informal personal networks—with friends, neighbors, family members, and all sorts of other relationships.

Some informal networks arise because of personal interests. Two colleagues who are avid basketball fans or share a fascination with rare books are more likely to swap information on work than coworkers who have no such bonds. Personal friendships also create connections that can lead to increased communication. Finally, physical proximity increases the chances for interaction. Shared office space or frequent meetings around the copying machine make it likely that people will exchange information. Even sharing restrooms can lead to networking, as public relations executive James E. Lukaszewski observes in describing one anatomical difference that has benefited men.

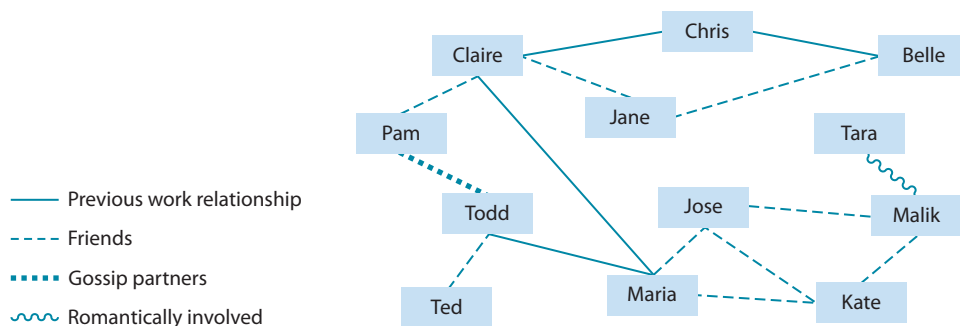


FIGURE 1.3
An Informal
Communication
Network

Source: Adapted from Orbe, M. P., & Bruess, C. J. (2007). *Contemporary issues in interpersonal communication*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

This may sound facetious, even silly, but when these meetings break, where are the women and where are the men? The guys go to the porcelain in that little room with M-E-N on the door. . . . The guys are standing there, facing the wall, talking and deciding things. It's a critical opportunity for important verbal communication to take place during times of decision making.⁵⁴

As this quote suggests, informal networks are often a source of important job-related information, organizational resources, career advice, and social connections that help workers successfully navigate their careers. When someone is excluded from that network—even unintentionally—he or she is placed at a major disadvantage. For example, research has shown that women often are cut off from informal communication networks, and this has a real impact on their ultimate career success.⁵⁵ The difference is even more pronounced for minority women, who face “concrete walls” that isolate them from informal relationships with superiors and peers.⁵⁶ It's important to identify the informal networks in your organization and try to get as involved as possible—especially if you are a woman or a minority.

Functions of Informal Networks within Organizations Not all informal messages are idle rumors. Informal communication can serve several useful functions:

- *Confirming formal messages:* “The boss is really serious this time about cutting down on overnight travel. I heard him yelling about it when I walked past his office.”
- *Expanding on formal messages:* “The invitation to the office party says ‘casual dress,’ but don't make it too informal.”
- *Expediting official messages:* You might learn about openings within an organization from people in your network long before the vacancies are published.
- *Contradicting official messages:* You might learn from a friend in accounting that the deadline for purchases on this year's budget isn't as firm as it sounded in the comptroller's recent memo.
- *Circumventing formal channels:* Your tennis partner who works in duplicating might sneak in an occasional rush job for you instead of putting it at the end of the line.

Many companies elevate informal communication to an official policy by encouraging open, unstructured contacts between people from various parts of the organization. For example, Hewlett-Packard's approach to problem solving has been termed MBWA, “management by wandering around.”

Some observers consider informal contacts to be the primary means of communication within an organization. In one survey, 57 percent of the respondents said that the grapevine is “the only way to find out what's really happening” in their organizations.⁵⁷ A decade of research shows engineers and scientists were five times more likely to turn to a person for information than to impersonal sources like the databases or files.⁵⁸ Two well-known analysts flatly assert that as much as 90 percent of what goes on in a company has nothing to do with formal events.⁵⁹ Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, David Krackhardt and Jeffrey Hanson capture the difference between formal and informal networks: “If the formal organization is the skeleton of a company, the informal is the central nervous system.”⁶⁰

Like the human nervous system, informal networks are faster, and often more dependable, than formal channels.⁶¹ They also provide a shortcut (and sometimes a way around) for the slower and more cumbersome formal channels, making innovation easier.⁶² This fact helps explain why organizational decision makers tend to rely on verbal information from trusted associates.⁶³ Smart communicators don't just rely on informal contacts with peers for information; they take advantage of sources throughout the organization. One study revealed that general managers spent a great deal of time with people who were not direct subordinates, superiors, or peers—people with whom, according to the official chain of command, they had no need to deal. Although many

Your Elevator Speech

Get the chance to present yourself and your ideas lasts less than a minute. You meet a prospective customer at a party. You run into your boss on the street. You are introduced to a potential employer in a hallway. Whether networking opportunities like these turn out well or not may depend on your foresight and preparation.

When the opportunity arises, you can make a good impression by delivering what is called an “elevator speech.” (This type of communication gets its name because it should be brief enough to deliver in the length of an elevator ride.) Elevator speeches can accomplish a variety of goals. Besides serving as introductions, they can be a tool for seeking help, establishing a relationship, gaining visibility, marketing yourself or your organization, getting feedback, expanding your personal network, and doing an end-run around someone who is blocking your progress.

Practice your skill at presenting yourself briefly and effectively by planning and delivering an elevator speech to your classmates. Your speech should contain four parts and take less than a minute to deliver.

1. State your name and your current job title or position.
“Hi. I’m Claire Yoder. I’m a senior, graduating in December.”
2. Describe some personal strengths or distinguishing information.

“I’m completing my accounting major this semester with a 3.8 GPA, and I’ve developed additional skills in tax preparation through volunteer work with Tax-Help USA.”

3. Depending on your audience, state what you can do for others *or* ask for their help.
“If you or someone you know needs help with tax preparation, I can help,” *or* “If you know of any openings in accounting, I’d like to hear about them.”
4. Indicate how the person can get in touch with you or how you plan to contact this person.
“Here’s my card with my e-mail address. I’d like to hear from you.”

While modesty is a virtue, don’t be bashful about presenting yourself as an interesting and competent person. Whether or not you want to, you are always presenting yourself to others. Brevity and sincerity are the keys to an elevator speech. Don’t overwhelm your audience with information; present enough to make sure you create a positive impression and, ideally, to be asked for more information.

Sources: Wallace, M. (1998, July 1). The elevator speech: It’s there for you. *Law Library Resource Exchange*. Retrieved from <http://www.llrx.com/columns/guide18.htm>. See also Brown, J. G. (2009, October 8). 3 ways to pitch yourself in 30 seconds. *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*. Retrieved from http://blogs.harvardbusiness.org/cs/2009/10/nail_your_elevator_pitch.html?cm_mmc=npv_-_WEEKLY_HOTLIST_-_OCT_2009_-HOTLIST1013

of these people—administrative assistants, lower-level subordinates, and supervisors with little power—seemed relatively unimportant to outsiders, successful managers all seemed to cultivate such contacts.⁶⁴

Enlightened organizations do everything possible to encourage constructive, informal interaction. Siemens leaves overhead projectors and empty pads of paper in its factory lobbies to facilitate informal meetings.⁶⁵ Corning Glass deliberately installed escalators in its new engineering building to boost the kind of face-to-face contacts less likely in elevators. 3M sponsors clubs for any group of employees that requests them, realizing this sort of employee interaction is likely to encourage new ideas that will help the company. Other firms mingle workers from different departments in the same office, convinced that people who rub elbows will swap ideas and see themselves as part of a companywide team.

Informal networks don’t just operate within organizations. Friends, neighbors, and community members increase their effectiveness by sharing information. In some cities, chambers of commerce host networking events to encourage these ties among community businesses. Even without these organized contacts, most people are surprised to realize just how many people they know who can offer useful information.

Your Professional LinkedIn Profile

The social networking website LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) has been called “Facebook for professionals.” More than 120 million members around the world use this service to advance their careers. Used appropriately, LinkedIn can help you manage your professional identity, expand your network of contacts, and enhance career opportunities. The following guidelines can help you use LinkedIn effectively.

Manage Your Professional Identity

- Adjust settings to display the optimal amount of information about yourself. For example, if you’re unemployed, you might want to display all of your “moves” so prospective employers can appreciate your initiative. On the other hand, if you’re discretely looking for another job, you may not want your manager and colleagues to see your flurry of searches of companies and requests for recommendations.
- Use LinkedIn for professional messages only. Don’t link your page to your Facebook or Twitter identity if you use those tools to share nonprofessional information.
- Use LinkedIn’s multimedia capabilities to showcase your work (and yourself).
- Request 360-degree feedback from professors, colleagues, supervisors, and clients who can comment

on your work, attitude, skills, achievements, professionalism, and integrity.

- Create personal and powerful headlines and summaries. Avoid cutting and pasting your resume into your summary.
- Proofread everything you post. A single error can demolish your credibility.

Learn from Others

- Join, contribute to, and use groups. Begin by searching for groups in your career field. Focus on trends, glean advice, and garner news and tips particular to your field. Connect with national and international groups as well as local groups to explore employment, training, and networking opportunities virtually and in person. When you understand the culture of different groups, contribute your knowledge, links to pertinent articles, upcoming events, or book reviews.
- Use the Answers Forum to discover what types of questions others are asking and to learn from the answers. Browse by topic and subtopic (e.g., résumé writing, start-ups and small business, nonprofit, work-life balance, mentoring, finance) or by language.

Source: Serdula, D. (n.d.) *LinkedIn makeover: Professional secrets to a powerful LinkedIn profile*. Retrieved from <http://www.linkedin-makeover.com/blog>

Personal Networking

While all of us have personal contacts, **networking**, as the term is usually used, has a strategic dimension that goes beyond being sociable. It is the process of deliberately meeting people and maintaining contacts to get career information, advice, and leads—and in turn to help others. Some professionals use social networks such as Facebook for business contacts, while others are networking at sites like LinkedIn, which are designed expressly for business purposes. As you explore and expand your network, keep the following tips in mind.⁶⁶

People with highly developed personal networks are more successful in their careers.⁶⁷ Over their lifetimes, they earn more raises, are promoted more often, and are generally more satisfied with their jobs. This isn’t surprising. With better networks, people have more access to career sponsorship, resources, and information. But membership in any one network probably won’t accomplish these goals. The key is to have a wide and diverse network with all kinds of people. You can create and benefit from personal networks by following these tips.

View Everyone as a Networking Prospect Consider all the networks to which you already belong: family members, friends, neighbors, social acquaintances, fellow workers, members of your religious community, professionals (doctors, dentists, accountants, attorneys, etc.), and school contacts (faculty, fellow students, counselors, etc.). Beyond the people you already know, almost everyone you meet has the potential to be a source of useful information. The passenger seated next to you on a plane or train might be acquainted with people who can help you. The neighbor who chats with you at a block party might have the knowledge or skill to help you solve a problem. Within an organization, the best informants are often people you might overlook. Administrative assistants are exposed to most of the information addressed to their managers, and they usually serve as gatekeepers who can give or deny access to them. Custodial and maintenance people travel around the building and, in their rounds, see and hear many interesting things.

Be Sensitive to Personal and Cultural Factors While everyone you meet is a potential networking prospect, it's important to think of each person as an individual. Some welcome the chance to share information, whereas others may object to more than occasional contacts. It's also important to recognize culture plays a role in networking practices.

Treat Your Contacts with Gratitude and Respect Don't make the mistake of equating networking with being dishonest or exploitive. As long as you express a genuine desire for information openly, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Furthermore, seeking information doesn't mean you have to stop enjoying others' company for social reasons. When others do give you information, be sure to express your appreciation. At the very least, a "thank-you" is in order. Even better, let your networking contacts know exactly *how* the information they gave you was helpful.

Help Others Don't just be an information-seeker. Whenever possible, make an effort to put people who will benefit from contact in touch with one another: "You're looking for a new bookkeeper? I know someone who might be right for you!" Besides being the right thing to do, helping others will earn you a reputation for generosity that can serve you well.⁶⁸

Get Referrals to Secondary Sources The benefits of personal networks don't stop with your personal acquaintances. Each person you know has his or her own connections, some of whom could be useful to you. Researchers have demonstrated the "small world" phenomenon: A study on the "six degrees of separation" hypothesis involving more than 45,000 messages and more than 150 countries has demonstrated that the average number of links separating any two people in the world is indeed a half-dozen.⁶⁹ You can apply this principle to your own information by only seeking people removed from your personal network by one degree: If you ask 10 people for referrals and each of them knows 10 others who might be able to help, you have the potential of support from 100 information-givers.

Secondary sources are so valuable that some online networking group sites exist to help users find the contacts they need. Having a network of people who can refer you to others can be especially helpful in today's workforce, where people often stay in a job for only a year or two.

Seek a Mentor A mentor is a person who acts as a guide, trainer, coach, and counselor; who teaches you the informal rules of an organization or a field; and who imparts the kinds of wisdom that come from firsthand experience. Many organizations have formal

Guanxi: Networking Chinese-Style

Any savvy businessperson in China knows the value of *guanxi* (pronounced *guan-shee*)—the web of social relationships that help get a job done through the granting of favors. It takes *guanxi* to get a good job, find a good apartment, overcome bureaucratic hurdles, line up suppliers and distributors. In other words, it's required to accomplish almost any transaction. As one observer put it, "In the West, relationships grow out of deals. In China, deals grow out of relationships."⁷⁰

It may be tempting to think of *guanxi* as the Chinese equivalent of Western networking, but the concept has far more cultural and practical significance. The unwritten code of *guanxi* is rooted in the Chinese national character, reflecting the Confucian emphasis on loyalty, obligation, order, and social harmony.

Guanxi operates on three levels.⁷¹ The strongest bond is with immediate family. In relationships linked by blood and marriage, higher-status members are obligated to perform favors for their lower-status relatives. In return, lower-status family members are obligated to demonstrate fierce loyalty. To a lesser extent, *guanxi* connects extended family members, friends, neighbors, classmates, and people with other

strong commonalities. Unlike the closest form of *guanxi*, obligations in these relationships are usually reciprocal; receiving help creates an obligation to return the favor. The least powerful level of *guanxi* is between people who know one another but have no strong relational history. At this level, *guanxi* is similar to networking connections in the West. These relationships lack the history, trust, and power of stronger bonds.

Developing *guanxi* can be challenging for foreigners who want to do business in China, but it isn't impossible. One strategy is to rely on intermediaries to make initial connections. This practice is widespread among native Chinese, so a foreigner won't stand out for using it. Once introduced, be prepared to socialize. Even more so than in the West, important business is often conducted outside of the workplace. When socializing, look for the chance to emphasize commonalties—business experiences, education, and mutual acquaintances are a few examples. After enough trust has developed to seek favors, be indirect. As you will read in Chapter 2, Asian cultures consider oblique, "high-context" communication as a sign of sensitivity and skill. Finally, remember that *guanxi* is reciprocal. Accepting help from others obliges you to assist them in the future.

programs that match new employees with experienced ones. Other mentor-protégé relationships develop informally and unofficially. However you find one, a mentor can be invaluable. This is especially true for women, minorities, and people trying to break into nontraditional fields where "good old boy" networks can be hard to penetrate.⁷²

A successful mentoring relationship isn't a one-time affair. Instead, it passes through several stages.⁷³ In the initial phase, the parties get to know one another and gain confidence in each other's commitment to the relationship. After the initial stage, a period of cultivation occurs in which the mentor guides his or her protégé through a series of conversations and tasks with the goal of building knowledge, confidence, and skill. By the third phase of the relationship, the protégé can function mostly on his or her own, with occasional guidance from the mentor. Finally, the fourth stage involves either separation or a redefinition of the relationship as one of peers. Not all mentoring relationships are this involved or long-lasting; but whether they are relatively brief or ongoing, they can provide great value and satisfaction for both mentor and protégé.

Whatever the relationship, some rules guide mentoring relationships.⁷⁴ Look for someone with a position in a field that interests you. Don't be bashful about aiming high: You may be surprised by successful people's willingness to give back by helping aspiring

newcomers. Approach your mentor professionally, showing you are serious about growing in your career. See The Career Research Interview in Chapter 6 for guidelines on how to handle this process.

Once you have found a mentor, show respect for his or her time by keeping most of your contacts to regularly scheduled times. Be sure to follow up on your mentor's suggestions about reading, checking websites, and attending activities.

Realize that a mentoring relationship should be primarily professional. If you have serious personal problems, turn to a counselor. A mentor may be able to help you with some personal problems as they affect your work life, but a mentor should not become an emotional crutch. Remember that any personal insights mentors and proteés share should be kept confidential. Finally, don't expect a mentor to grant you special favors, intervene on your behalf with your boss, or boost your chances for promotion. The advice you receive should be reward enough.

Network throughout Your Career Networking isn't just for job-seekers. It can be just as important once you start climbing the career ladder. In an era when changing jobs and even changing careers is common, expanding your options is always a smart move.

• Ethical Dimensions of Communication

Some cynics have noted the trouble with business ethics is that the phrase is an oxymoron. Despite this attitude, there is a growing recognition that behaving ethically is an essential part of being an effective, promotable employee. Scandalous business practices led to the downfall of major corporations like Enron and WorldCom and have cost others millions of dollars. As a result of these ethical lapses, sensitivity to communicating in a principled way has grown, and several hundred corporations and organizations now include an ethics officer in their organizational chart who reports directly to the chairman.⁷⁵ Employees share this concern for ethics. One survey of 800 recent MBA graduates revealed that virtually all were willing to forgo some money to work for an organization with a better reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethics.⁷⁶

Doing the ethical thing isn't always easy. On a personal level, you are likely to face conflicts between what you believe is right and what is practical. For instance, you might have to deal with a customer or colleague whose business or approval you want, but who is behaving badly—perhaps making sexist or racist remarks. After a trip together, coworkers turn in inflated expenses and expect you to do the same. Your team is under pressure to finish a project, but you recognize potential safety issues being shortcut. Besides personal challenges, sooner or later you are likely to experience situations like these where others in your organization behave in ethically questionable ways. Do you speak up when a colleague makes promises to clients that you know the company can't keep? Should you challenge your boss when he or she treats other employees unfairly or illegally?

It has been said that ethics centers on a sense of responsibility for someone other than yourself.⁷⁷ A blanket obligation to communicate ethically can be too vague to be helpful in specific situations. Five philosophical principles offer standards that can help you decide how to behave in a principled manner.⁷⁸ There is no single "right" approach to ethics; these competing ethical perspectives often lead to conflicting actions. For example, what one group perceives as "virtuous" might not bring good to the greatest number; or what one group considers moral might be considered immoral to another group. When

ETHICAL challenge

Ethical Communication Choices

Descriptions for these seven guidelines for judging ethical communication are provided in the text:

- Utilitarian Approach
- Rights Approach
- Fairness or Justice Approach
- Common-Good Approach
- Virtue Approach
- Professional Ethic
- Publicity Test

Outline the range of ways you could handle each situation below. Use two or more of the ethical guidelines to compare courses of action. Then decide on a course of action you believe to be both principled and realistic. Justify your decision.

1. A coworker tells you he's about to buy an expensive car that will strain his budget to the maximum. You recently learned he is slated to be laid off at the end of the month but were told to keep this information in strictest confidence. What do you do?
2. Your friend is applying for a job and has given you as a reference. A questionnaire sent by the

employer asks if there is any reason you cannot recommend the applicant. You know that your friend is struggling with an alcohol problem, which led to dismissal from a previous job. Do you mention this problem on the reference form? If so, how?

3. Your manager calls you into her office and praises you for doing excellent work on a recent project. She suggests that this level of performance is likely to earn you a promotion and a raise. In truth, a colleague made a far greater contribution to the project. How do you respond to your manager's praise?
4. As part of your job, you learn that some damaged equipment can be repaired for \$15,000. Your supervisor tells you to claim the damage is much greater so the insurance company will pay closer to \$100,000. What do you do?
5. While you are entertaining a customer, he makes a blatantly offensive joke. How do you respond?

Sources: Adapted from Richardson, J. E. (Ed.). (2003). *Business ethics 03/04* (15th ed.). Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin; Soeken, D (2008). Ch. witnessing a fraud. In J. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Business ethics 07/08* (19th ed.). Dubuque, IA McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

faced with a decision about how to communicate ethically, it's helpful to ponder the situation from several viewpoints before proceeding.

Utilitarian Approach (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill): Does this action provide the greatest good for the greatest number?

Rights Approach (Immanuel Kant): Does this action respect the moral rights (truth, privacy, noninjury, promises) of everyone?

Fairness or Justice Approach (Aristotle, John Rawls): Is this action fair and free of discrimination or favoritism?

Common-Good Approach (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, John Rawls): Does the action further the common or community good?

Virtue Approach: Does this action promote the development of moral virtue (character) in me and my community?

Two additional guidelines can help you evaluate whether you are behaving ethically:

Professional Ethic: How would an impartial jury of your professional peers judge this action?

Publicity Test: Would you be comfortable having the public learn about your behavior in the broadcast or print media?⁷⁹

MASTER the chapter

- Communication is important for career success.
- Communication is unavoidable, strategic, and irreversible. It is a process that involves instrumental and relational communication and identity management. It isn't a panacea that will solve all problems.
- The communication model demonstrates how senders and receivers encode and decode messages in the process of developing a shared meaning. To improve communication, consider the characteristics of various channels, the desired tone of the message, the organization's culture, and the use of multiple channels.
- Noise can interfere with exchange of a message. It can be environmental, physiological, or psychological and can be present in the sender, receiver, message, or channel. Good communicators reduce noise as much as possible.
- Formal communication networks (organizational charts) represent management's view of organizational relationships: upward, downward, and horizontal/lateral.
- Informal networks, based on proximity, shared interests, or friendships, serve to confirm, expand, expedite, contradict, or circumvent formal communication.
- Effective communicators cultivate and use personal networking for career success.
- Professional success necessitates an understanding of and ability to apply various ethical frameworks (utilitarian, rights, fairness/justice, common good, virtue, professional ethic, publicity test) to consistently make principled decisions around ethical challenges.

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1. Invitation to Insight

Keep a log of your work-related (or school-related) communication over a three-day period. Include who you have communicated with (superior, subordinate, peer, external) and your level of satisfaction with the communication. Based on your findings, analyze the following:

- a. How much time you spend communicating.
- b. With whom you communicate. (Identify each example as downward, upward, or horizontal flow of communication.)
- c. Which channels of communication you tend to use most frequently.
- d. Your level of satisfaction.
- e. Areas where improving your communication skill would be desirable.

2. Invitation to Insight

Think about a situation you have experienced in which communication went wrong. Diagnose the problem by finding the parts of the communication process that contributed to the trouble. Suggest a remedy for each problem you identify:

- a. Sender: Did the wrong person send the message?
- b. Encoding: Did the sender use words or non-verbal cues that were confusing, inappropriate, or irrelevant?
- c. Message: Was the message too short or too long? Were there too many messages? Was the timing wrong?
- d. Channel: Was the most appropriate channel chosen?
- e. Receiver: Was there no receiver at all? Was the message poorly formulated for the person(s) at whom it was aimed? Was it received by the wrong person?
- f. Decoding: Did the receiver read in meanings that were not intended?

- g. Feedback: What impact did the feedback have on the sender? Did the feedback help or hinder shared understanding?
- h. Noise: In what ways did environmental, physiological, or psychological noise distort the message? Provide specific examples.

3. Invitation to Insight

Learn about upward communication in the workplace by asking several employees what types of information they share with their supervisors. What types of information do they avoid sharing with their supervisors? How does the organization encourage or discourage accurate upward communication?

4. Skill Builder

Develop your skill at cultivating informal communication networks by following these instructions:

- a. Choose one of the following information goals, or identify a school-related or work-related goal of your own.
 1. Decide which instructors and/or courses in an academic department of your institution are worth seeking out and which you might want to avoid.
 2. Identify the qualities that would help you get the job of your dreams.
 3. Locate an organization where you could gain job experience as a volunteer or intern.
- b. Identify the people who can help you acquire the information you are seeking. Locate people from a variety of positions within the organization so you will gain a complete perspective. For each person, decide which channel you could use to begin to develop your network.

5. Skill Builder

With your group members, formulate a hypothetical context for each message below. Then use the information on pp. 101–114 to decide which communication channel would be best for each message. Use the criteria from Table 1-2 to explain your choice:

- a. Informing your supervisor about difficulties with a coworker.
- b. Asking for a few days of leave from work to attend a special reunion.
- c. Training a new employee to operate a complicated computer program.
- d. Notifying the manager of a local business that you still haven't received the refund you were promised.
- e. Reminding your busy boss about a long overdue reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

- f. Apologizing to a customer for a mistake your company made.
- g. Getting your boss's reaction to the idea of giving you more responsibility.

6. Invitation to Insight

Ask a few of your acquaintances to describe an ethical dilemma they've encountered in the workplace or in their personal lives. How did they handle the situation? What factors influenced them?

With a group of classmates, determine which ethical perspectives your informants seemed to rely on as they decided how to act. Apply various ethical perspectives to the same situations. Would you have followed the same course of action your informants did? Why or why not?



For further review, go to the LearnSmart study module for this chapter.