

WEEK 4

COMMUNICATION MASTERY

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

Engage members in a conversation about communication skills and how those may change following a TBI.

The primary goals of this week will be for participants to:

- ❑ Normalize difficulty in communication, and encourage members to share experiences
- ❑ Introduce different communication styles and ask members to identify pros and cons of each
- ❑ Introduce skills for effective communication and practice skills in an activity
- ❑ Participants will utilize communication skills to communicate their homework within the group

TIME:

Allow 1.5 hours for the session.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

A minimum of four participants is recommended.

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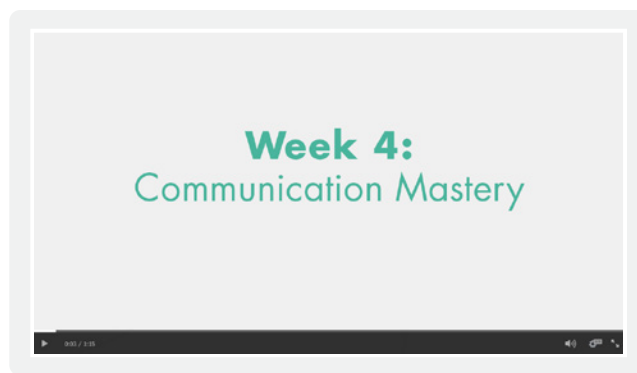
PREPARATION



VIDEO

Watch the following video:

<https://youtu.be/fZReF6XmphU>



PRINT HANDOUTS

- Understanding Your Communication Styles
- Four Part I-Statements
- Fifteen Effective Communication Techniques
- Take Home Impressions

These handouts can be found in the handout section for this week, the facilitator's guide will indicate when these should be referenced.



WRITE

Write the following group rules on the white board for reference for participants throughout the treatment group:

- **Confidentiality:** The information we discuss in this group is private, and members are expected to keep it that way.
- **Respect:** Give your attention and consideration to participants, and they will do the same for you. Examples include:
 - No talking over each other,
 - Pay attention to the person talking (listen, don't just wait for your turn to talk)
 - Encourage each other, etc.
- **Participation:** You are expected to take part in the discussion and contribute to this group. The pace of this group, however, may limit some participation. Let's briefly discuss one way that the group leader(s) can signal you when we need to wrap up discussion and move on.

Note: *If additional rules were agreed upon, be sure to include each additional rule during this review.*

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PREPARATION



WRITE

Write the following learning objectives on the white board for reference throughout the treatment group:

- Structure and topic
- Homework review
- Communication difficulties
- Introduction to communication styles
- Break
- Communication Skills Activity
- Reflection/Homework

Write the following four styles of communication on the white board for the participants to reference while you are presenting them. These will be utilized later in this treatment group for the activity and group discussion:

- Assertive
- Aggressive
- Passive
- Passive Aggressive

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ACTIVITIES



ESTABLISH GROUP RULES

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to review the rules that we will follow throughout the duration of this treatment group. If you have any questions about any of the group rules, I can help to clarify what is meant by that rule.

- 1. Confidentiality:** The information we discuss in this group is private, and members are expected to keep it that way. What is discussed in the group may be highly personal at times, and should not be discussed outside of the group.
- 2. Respect:** Give your attention and consideration to your fellow participants, and they will do the same for you. Examples of respectful behavior include:
 - Not talking over each other
 - Paying attention to the person talking (listen, don't just wait for your turn to talk)
 - Encouraging each other by responding to each other in a positive manner. Have the participants give other examples of how to show respect, and add those to the list as desired.
- 3. Participation:** You are expected to take part in the discussion and contribute to this group. The pace of this group, however, may limit some participation. Often individuals who have TBI struggle to stay on topic. Let's briefly discuss one way that the group leader(s) can signal you if you are off topic and/or when we need to wrap up discussion and move on.

Note: Ask the group participants what other rules they believe should be in place, and add them to the list if they are applicable and constructive rules that are agreed upon by most or all the group members. It may be helpful to write the group rules on the board, or to create a written list on a large sheet of paper that may be posted in the group room for easy reference. Be sure to communicate to participants the expectations you have for their behavior (for example, how you would like people to excuse themselves from the group if a break becomes necessary, how the group should handle conflicts among group members, etc.). Setting these specifics out ahead of time will help to avoid confusion when these situations inevitably occur.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

What other rules does the group want to establish?



ICE BREAKER AND INTRODUCTION

5-10 MINUTES

If incorporating new participants into the group, write the Icebreaker questions outlined in Group 1 on the white board so members can refer to them. Facilitator should utilize one or both of the following Icebreaker questions to warm up the group and build rapport. The facilitator should feel free to participate in this Icebreaker activity by sharing their responses alongside group members.

- What song always makes you feel happier when you hear it?
- If you could travel to any country in the world, where would you go, and why?

Review Take-Home Impressions Form

- During the past week, have you done anything differently because of what you learned in previous groups? If so, please describe what you did.
- Were you able to use your new strategies/skills in any way? Please describe your experience.



EXPLAIN THE NATURE AND PACING OF THE GROUP

2-5 MINUTES

- Because we only have an hour and a half for each group meeting, it is important that we cover everything that is necessary.
- Today, I will guide you through several topics on communication skills and how those may change following a TBI. We will discuss how TBI affects communication, and how it may have changed since your injury. We will also discuss different communication styles and you will all identify the pros and cons of each. Finally, we will discuss skills for effective communication and practice these skills in an activity.

- Remember, to get through all the material, I will be keeping us on point by giving reminders when that section's time is almost up. If we are off-topic, I will redirect you to the relevant topic. If you would like to continue to discuss the topic that I redirected you from, please let me know after group so that we can discuss it at greater length. If necessary, we'll use the signal we agreed upon earlier to wrap up discussions.
- **Remember:** To get through all the material, I will be keeping us on point by giving reminders when that section's time is almost up. If we are off-topic, I will redirect you to the relevant topic. If you would like to continue to discuss the topic that I redirected you from, please let me know after group so that we can discuss it at greater length. If necessary, we'll use the signal we agreed upon earlier to wrap up discussions.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?



HOMEWORK REVIEW

5-10 MINUTES

During the previous week, you were asked to use the "Mood Log" (found in handouts section) worksheet to chart your mood.

- How did it go?
- What were some challenges?
- Do you feel you were successful?

Note: *If participants have not completed the previously assigned homework, please ask the following question:*

- *What led to your decision to not complete the assignment?*
- *What do you need to do for yourself this week to help you be able to complete the homework assignment?*

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CONTENT



CONVERSATION ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

10 MINUTES

- What do you find difficult about communicating with others?
- How do you think TBI may affect communication?
- How do you suspect your ability to communicate with others changed since your TBI?
- Remember, communication is difficult. It is normal to have the difficulties we are discussing after a TBI.



ORAL COMMUNICATION STYLES

5-10 MINUTES

Facilitator should distribute the “Understanding Your Communication Style” handout (found below in the handout section for this week). There are four main communication styles we are going to discuss today: Passive, Passive-Aggressive, Aggressive, and Assertive..

- **Passive:** When you avoid expressing your opinions and feelings, and do not respond to hurtful or anger-inducing situations. Instead, you allow annoyances to mount, until you have an explosive outburst that is out of proportion to the triggering incident. Afterward, you might feel shame, guilt, or confusion, and go back to being passive.
- **Passive-Aggressive:** You appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. You may feel powerless, stuck, and resentful and feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of your resentment. Instead, you express anger by subtly undermining the person who you resent.

- **Aggressive:** When you express your feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others. You can be verbally or physically abusive.
- **Assertive:** You clearly state your opinions and feelings without violating the needs of others. You value yourself and your time, and are a strong advocate for yourself while being very respectful of the rights of others.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Open discussion for participants on their thoughts on the above.

- What are your experiences with each communication style?
- How do you think a TBI may affect these styles? (Examples: struggling to make/maintain eye contact, experiencing difficulty noticing subtle social cues such as body language, difficulty establishing and maintaining a comfortable sense of one's or others' personal space, being unaware of the appropriate time to enter a conversation and interrupting others as a result)
- Which of these four communication styles feels most natural to you? Which one do you think you use the most?
- Do you believe that any aspects of your communication may have changed since your TBI?

BREAK

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to take a five-minute break. During this break, we are going to do a guided breathing exercise. Breathing exercises are well-researched strategies for helping us manage our out-of-control emotions and they help us focus our attention.

- Let's focus in on a specific breathing technique called square breathing. Imagine drawing a square in the air in front of you. As you draw your finger across the top of the square, breathe in and count to 7. As you draw the side of the square, hold that breath for 7 seconds. As you draw the bottom of the square, breathe out slowly through your lips. As you draw the other side of the square, hold once more for seven seconds before drawing in a new breath.



INTRODUCE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

10-20 MINUTES

Now we are going to discuss effective communication skills.

- Talking alone does not facilitate a discussion. There are certain aspects of interaction with others that you may not necessarily think about, but which have significant effects on the interaction.
- Can anyone name some of these (e.g. eye contact, tone of voice, body language)?
- These are some skills that can help communication:
 - **Maintain frequent eye contact.** This lets the person you are interacting with know that you are interested and engaged. Use “open” body language. Open body language means not crossing your arms, not looking away, and facing the person you are interacting with. (Here, the facilitator may illustrate the difference between open and closed body language.)
 - **Keep a positive or neutral tone of voice.** Much about a person’s thought process can be understood from *how* they say something, not *what* they say. For example, if you suspect your friend is upset and you ask them what’s wrong, and they respond by saying, “I’m fine,” with a negative tone, you know that they are not actually fine. (Facilitator may demonstrate how saying the same statement, such as, “Today is an awesome day,” using different tones communicates very different meanings.)

Facilitator should distribute “Four Part I-Statements” handout (found in the handouts section for this week).

- **“I Statements”** are a great and simple conversation tool that people can use to get across what they are truly thinking or feeling to someone else, without causing the other person to get defensive. The important thing about I Statements is that rather than approaching an issue in a way that attacks or places blame on someone else, you approach the issue from your own point of view and speak about how you are feeling because of the other person’s actions. I Statements are assertive, not aggressive, because they allow you to stand firm in your own point of view without attacking the other person.

Here's how an I Statement is structured:

“When you _____, I feel _____, because _____.”

Example: Say your friend was supposed to return your phone call, but didn't. Instead of saying something like, “I can't believe you forgot to call me back! You don't care about me!” You could use the I Statement technique to say, “When you forget to call me back, I feel disappointed, because I really look forward to our conversations.” Which approach do you think would lead to a more productive conversation? Why?

Example: “When you criticize my driving in the car, it makes me feel nervous, because I cannot concentrate on the road.”

Example: “When you yell at me, it makes me feel flustered and upset, because I feel like you are trying to intimidate me rather than communicate with me.”

Have group participants come up with their own scenarios and I Statements.

- o Another important communication skill is **staying away from “absolutes.”** Absolutes are words such as “always,” and “never.” For example, “You always do this!” or “You never listen to me!” Why might these statements cause problems in communication? (Answer: They overgeneralize, and cause the other person to feel defensive.) After all, is anything in life ever ALWAYS or NEVER true? Very rarely. Let's look at the following examples to see how staying away from using absolute terms makes a conversation or conflict less hostile.

Example: Your spouse forgot to take out the garbage for the third week in a row. Instead of saying, “You always forget to take out the trash when it's your turn!” you might say, “I've noticed you've forgotten to take out the trash the past few weeks. Is there something I can do to help you remember?”

Practice taking the absolutes out of the following statements and/or re-wording them as I Statements for better communication.

1. “You never ask me how my day was when I get home. You must not care about me!”
2. “Whenever we are out with friends, you always put me down in front of them.”
3. “It's never my turn to pick where we go to dinner. You always choose!”
4. “You're never honest with me about your feelings.”

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GROUP ACTIVITY



COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

10 MINUTES

Let's try and use what we have been discussing now.

- **Remember:** you can reference the board and our examples.
- I want you to break up into pairs. I would like you to utilize all of the skills to communicate this topic to with your partner using whichever communication style you think would be best. Here are two scenarios to use to practice using assertive communication skills.

1. You and the other person made plans to meet at the movies at six o'clock, but the other person didn't show up until six thirty, causing you to miss the movie.

2. You agreed to let your friend live with you on the condition that they split the rent, but it has been two months and they still have not paid their share.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

10 MINUTES

- After discussing with your partner, what were the difficulties in utilizing the different communication skills?
- How did using I Statements and staying away from absolutes make the conversation/confrontation easier?
- What strategies can you use to remind yourself to use these skills when you're in an emotionally heated situation?
- We have covered a lot of material today about communication and how to communicate with others effectively. Are there any questions about what we have discussed today?

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REFLECTION/ HOMEWORK



10 MINUTES

As we come to the end of group today, I would like us all to take a minute to reflect on the topics we have discussed today.

- What things helped you today? What things would you like to explore more?
- For a homework assignment, I would like you to review the handouts we've provided and work on practicing some communication strategies. If there is a conflict you feel comfortable addressing, give it a try. Then, review how addressing it using these new skills went with your support person, and be prepared to share in our next meeting.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Do you have any questions?

WEEK 4

HANDOUTS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLES

FOUR PART I-STATEMENTS

FIFTEEN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

TAKE HOME IMPRESSIONS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. Understanding your personal style of communicating will go a long way toward helping you to create good and lasting impressions on others. By becoming more aware of how others perceive you, you can adapt more readily to their styles of communicating. This does not mean you must be a chameleon, changing with every personality you meet. Instead, you can make another person more comfortable with you by selecting and emphasizing certain behaviors that fit within your personality and resonate with another.

There are four basic communication styles:

AGGRESSIVE

PASSIVE

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE

ASSERTIVE

ELEMENTS OF THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE:

1. Mottos and Beliefs

- "Everyone should be like me."
- "I am never wrong."
- "I've got rights, but you don't."

2. Attitudes

- Close minded
- Poor listener
- Has difficulty seeing the other person's point of view
- Interrupts others
- Monopolizes conversation

3. Characteristics

- Achieves goals, often at others' expense
- Domineering and bullying
- Patronizing
- Condescending and sarcastic

4. Behavior

- Puts others down
- Doesn't ever think they are wrong
- Bossy
- Moves into people's space, overpowers
- Jumps on others, pushes people around
- Know-it-all attitude
- Doesn't show appreciation for help from others

5. Nonverbal Cues

- Points, shakes finger
- Frowns
- Squints eyes critically
- Glares
- Stares
- Rigid posture
- Critical, loud, yelling tone of voice
- Fast, clipped speech

6. Verbal Cues

- "You must (should/ought to/better)..."
- "Don't ask why. Just do it."
- Verbal abuse

7. Confrontation and Problem Solving

- Must win arguments
- Uses threats or personal attacks
- Operates from win/lose position

8. Feelings Felt

- Anger
- Hostility
- Frustration
- Impatience

9. Effects

- Provokes counter-aggression, alienation from others, ill health
- Wastes time and energy over-supervising others
- Pays high price in human relationships
- Fosters resistance, defiance, sabotaging, striking back, forming alliances, lying, covering up
- Forces compliance with resentment

ELEMENTS OF THE PASSIVE STYLE:

1. Mottos and Beliefs

- "Don't express your true feelings."
- "Don't make waves."
- "Don't disagree."
- "Others have more rights than I do."

2. Communication Style

- Indirect
- Always seems to agree
- Doesn't speak up
- Hesitant to voice own opinion

3. Characteristics

- Apologetic, self-conscious
- Trusts others, but not self
- Doesn't express own wants and feelings
- Allows others to make decisions
- Doesn't get what he or she wants

4. Behaviors

- Sighs a lot
- Tries to sit on both sides of the fence to avoid conflict
- Clams up when feeling treated unfairly
- Asks permission unnecessarily
- Complains instead of taking action
- Lets others make choices
- Has difficulty implementing plans
- Self-effacing

5. Nonverbal Cues

- Fidgets
- Nods head often; comes across as pleading
- Lack of facial animation
- Smiles and nods in agreement
- Downcast eyes
- Slumped posture
- Low volume, meek
- Fast, when anxious; slow, hesitant, when doubtful

6. Verbal Cues

- "You should do it."
- "You have more experience than I do."
- "I can't..."
- "This is probably wrong, but..."
- "I'll try..."
- Monotone, low energy

7. Confrontation and Problem Solving

- Avoids, ignores, leaves, or postpones the conversation
- Withdraws, is sullen and silent
- Agrees externally, while disagreeing internally
- Expend energy to avoid conflicts that are anxiety provoking
- Spends too much time asking for advice, supervision
- Agrees too often

8. Feelings Felt

- Powerlessness
- Wonders why doesn't receive credit for good work
- Chalks lack of recognition to others' inabilities

9. Effects

- Gives up being him or herself
- Builds dependency relationships
- Doesn't know where he or she stands
- Slowly loses self esteem
- Promotes others' causes
- Is not well-liked

ELEMENTS OF THE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE STYLE:

Passive Aggressive is a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments. Passive-Aggressive communicators will often:

- Mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue
- Experience difficulty acknowledging their anger
- Use facial expressions that don't match how they feel - i.e., smiling when angry
- Use sarcasm
- Deny there is a problem, even when asked directly
- Appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt
- Use subtle forms of sabotage to "get even"

ELEMENTS OF THE ASSERTIVE STYLE

1. **Mottoes and Beliefs**

- Believes that both self and others are valuable
- Knowing that assertiveness doesn't mean you always win, but that you handled the situation as effectively as possible
- "I have rights, and so do others."

2. **Communication Style**

- Effective, active listener
- States limits and expectations
- States observations, not labels or judgments
- Expresses self directly, honestly, and as soon as possible about feelings and wants
- Checks on others feelings

3. **Characteristics**

- Non-judgmental
- Observes behavior rather than labeling it
- Trusts self and others
- Confident
- Self-aware
- Open, flexible, versatile
- Maintains a sense of humor
- Decisive
- Proactive, initiating

4. **Behavior**

- Operates from choice
- Knows what it is needed and develops a plan to get it
- Action-oriented
- Firm
- Realistic in their expectations
- Fair, just
- Consistent
- Takes appropriate action toward getting what they want without denying rights of others

5. **Nonverbal Cues**

- Open and natural gestures
- Attentive, interested facial expression
- Direct eye contact
- Confident or relaxed posture
- Vocal volume appropriate, expressive
- Varied rate of speech

6. **Verbal Cues**

- "I choose to..."
- "What are my options?"
- "What alternatives do we have?"

7. Confrontation and Problem Solving

- Negotiates, bargains, trades off, compromises
- Confronts problems at the time they happen
- Doesn't let negative feelings build up

8. Feelings Felt

- Enthusiasm
- Contentment

9. Even tempered

Effects

- Increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- Increased self-esteem of others
- Feels motivated and understood
- Others know where they stand

Clearly, the assertive style is the one to strive for. Keep in mind that very few people are all one or another style. In fact, the aggressive style is essential at certain times such as:

- When a decision must be made quickly;
- During emergencies;
- When you know you're right and that fact is crucial;
- Stimulating creativity by designing competitions destined for use in training or to increase productivity.

Passiveness also has its critical applications:

- When an issue is minor;
- When the problems caused by the conflict are greater than the conflict itself;
- When emotions are running high and it makes sense to take a break in order to calm down and regain perspective;
- When your power is much less than the other party's;
- When the other's position is impossible to change for all practical purposes (i.e., government policies, etc.)

The passive aggressive style generally has no critical applications and should be avoided.

FOUR-PART "I" STATEMENTS

'I' statements allow you to clearly state how you, personally, perceive and respond to a situation. You tell the other person how you feel, but you don't blame them for your feeling that way. 'I' statements can be particularly effective way of getting your message across when you are angry, irritated, upset, or are not getting what you want or need.

The four parts of an 'I' Statement are:

The action: "When..."

Your response: "I feel..."

Preferred outcome: "I would like..."

The benefit: "That way..."

Saying to someone "I think", "I need", "I want" or "I would like" is more likely to result in a positive outcome than starting with something like "You should" or "You are".

This approach also encourages the other person to tell you how they feel and be clear and specific about their needs.

1 THE ACTION

You need to describe the action or situation causing the problem objectively. Give a factual description of what happened.

Begin with something like:

"When messages are not passed on . . ."

"When I hear a raised voice . . ."

"When I'm told we are going out . . ."

Rather than:

"When you don't pass on a message . . ."

"When you rant and rave at me . . ."

"When you don't bother to tell me you've arranged to go out ..."

The last three ways are likely to cause the other person to be defensive. An objective description of the event can help the other person understand the effect their action has on you.

2**YOUR RESPONSE**

People don't always know the effect that their actions may have on others. When you are talking about your response to their action, rather than their action alone, you're on safer ground. People are less likely to argue the point if you say "I get angry" or "I feel frustrated".

1. Your response might be an emotion. For example, you might explain that you feel hurt, angry or ignored.
2. Telling people what you do can sometimes be easier than saying how you feel. For example, "I withdraw"; "I shout at you"; "I do everything myself".
3. You might tell the other person what you feel like doing, even if you don't do it. For example, "I feel like ignoring you"; "I want to walk out".

Avoid blaming others for how you feel. They may get defensive and reject the accusation with statements like: "If you get angry, that's your problem!"

3**YOUR PREFERRED OUTCOME**

Discuss what you would like to be able to do or have. This focuses on what would improve the situation for you without blaming the other person.

1. When I am told we're going to a party at the last minute (action).
2. I feel angry (response).
3. I would like to have a day's notice, so that I can plan for the evening (preferred outcome).
4. That way I can arrange a babysitter and be ready on time (the benefit)

4**THE BENEFIT**

Tell the other person what they will get out of changing their behavior - what's in it for them. They need to feel that they are winning too.

IMPOSE CONSEQUENCE

The fourth thing to communicate is a consequence, if needed. Remember that if you add a consequence, you need to be prepared to carry out the consequence.

Example: Next time you _____, I will _____."

FIFTEEN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

1 USING WISE SILENCE

Surprisingly, remaining silent can be one of the most effective strategies for communication, especially if you are trying to entice someone to share more information with you. Instead of immediately answering after your partner's completed statement, remain silent but attentive. This can encourage people to volunteer more information than they would have done otherwise. Practice this by pairing off, and simply discussing current events in your life. For example:

Person A: My daughter just had a baby!

Person B: (responds immediately) Aww, how adorable! Is it a boy or girl?

The information about the gender of the baby has to be coaxed out of person A rather than being freely offered. Now let's look at this exercise again.

Person A: My daughter just had a baby!

Person B: (remains silent but attentive, smiling)

Person A: She had an 8lb 5oz baby girl named Abigail. She's my second grandchild but my first granddaughter!

Instead of having to encourage the communication, the conversation continues naturally on its own. Note: When using this strategy, it is important to communicate interest using body language cues, so that the silence tactic does not come off as negative or disinterested.

2 ASK QUESTIONS

No matter how much information is readily volunteered, you will never learn everything you need to know without asking a few questions. What type of questions should you be asking?

- **Closed-ended questions** are designed to get a simple yes or no response. This can be a good tool if you need to gather basic information quickly, or want to obtain an answer without a long or drawn out explanation.
- **Open-ended questions** will provide you with a broader and more comprehensive answer. Instead of asking "Can I help you?" (Which is a closed ended question because it can be answered with a yes or no) ask "What brings you to our store today?"

3

LISTENING

Communication is effectively useless if you don't listen to and comprehend the responses that you get to your message. Listening isn't just using your ears to collect sounds. You need to understand the things that are said to you in such a way that you can form a coherent and knowledgeable response.

4

FEEDBACK

Feedback is an important part of communication, both from your intended recipients and from you. You should be able to convey your information in such a way that your targets can offer feedback or criticism on your information. They should also be able to form direct questions if anything is left unclear. To practice giving and receiving feedback, pair off and try to convey some form of information to your partner. This could be as simple as your favorite beef stew recipe, or as complex as the process for replacing the alternator in a car. Once you have conveyed this information to your partner to the best of your ability, he or she should offer feedback on your technique and the quality of the information.

This exercise is also a good way to learn how to accept criticism easily and well.

5

OBSERVATION

This is a good tactic if you have poor verbal or non-verbal communication skills. Find a way to place yourself in or around a large crowd of people. These don't have to be people that you know, and in many cases, it may be better to use people that you are unfamiliar with. A good setting to try practicing this is in a shopping mall, or a public park.

Once you've selected your group, the purpose of this exercise is to observe. Use your eyes and ears to learn how these skilled people communicate. Once you've gathered enough information, you should try to implement some of the tactics you have learned via your observation.

6

READ

If possible, focus on reading whenever you can. It doesn't necessarily have to be a book that you read. Pick up a magazine or newspaper or even read something online. What you read is not important; the important part is that you read.

Not only does reading keep you informed, it can help you to adapt and improve your written communication skills. Your verbal skills may also benefit because you will have new and exciting things to discuss with your coworkers or friends.

7

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Communication can be very stressful, especially if your skills are not up to par.

If you find yourself overly stressed by a situation, remove yourself from it for a few moments. This could be any situation that causes stress or anxiety, such as an argument or disagreement with a boss or coworker. Simply step away for a moment and take the time to compose yourself. Once you have done so, you will be able to approach the situation with a clearer head and communication will become infinitely easier.

8

EMPATHY

Empathy and/or emotional awareness are also essential for a clear transfer of information. You can easily recognize when your own emotions are causing issues with your communication. Being empathetic gives you the ability to discern when the emotions of others are likely to cause a problem. Empathy is made up of one part emotional awareness, and at least two parts body language translation. You can often discern the emotional state of a person by simply looking at how they hold themselves. A happy person will walk with their head up and shoulders back. They will make eye contact and will smile, or respond easily to an offered smile. A sad person, on the other hand, will often walk with their shoulders hunched and head bowed. They will not often respond to an offered smile, and if they do it will not reach their eyes.

Learning to read these intricate emotional cues can make you a more effective communicator.

9

ENTHUSIASM

One of the easiest ways to get someone to respond to you in a positive manner when you are communicating is to appear enthusiastic regarding what they are telling you. No one is going to want to talk to you if you sigh, roll your eyes, or seem otherwise impatient or bored while they are trying to convey their information. This can be as simple as maintaining eye contact, and modifying your body language to show that you are attentive and interested. Emphatic positive responses can help to magnify this feeling of enthusiasm. As a result, your speaker will be more interested in talking to you and will end the conversation with an overall positive outlook.

10

LANGUAGE CHOICES

The words you choose to use to describe yourself or others can have a dramatic effect on their overall receptiveness to your communication skills. For example, if you are trying to foster a sense of solidarity and cooperation, use pronouns like “we” and “us” to refer to the group. This will help them to consider themselves part of a team, rather than as an individual. “We need to come up with a plan to tackle this project”, implies that everyone is equal and can contribute to the group. Alternatively, if you are trying to set yourself apart, as a leader or boss, using pronouns like “I” and “me” can do that effectively. “I need to come up with a plan to tackle this project”, implies that you alone have what it takes to come up with a plan, and everyone else on the team will be expected to implement said plan once it has been completed.

11

KEEP A SENSE OF HUMOR

Keeping your sense of humor, even when things are looking bad, can be a great way to augment your communicative skills. Everyone likes to laugh, and laughing relieves stress and releases endorphins, which can help to improve the overall mood of the conversation. Make sure your humor is appropriate to the situation, though. No one should be cracking jokes at a funeral, after all, and not everyone will appreciate certain types of humor. Using common sense and discretion where humor is concerned is often the safest bet.

12 SMILE

Nothing sets a nervous team member at ease better than a friendly smile. A smile is your best tool and your best weapon rolled into one. A genuine smile can often entice an otherwise quiet or reserved person to be more open and willing to communicate. They are invaluable for setting nervous or apprehensive individuals at ease.

Your smile also makes an effective communications tool. Where a genuine smile can encourage feelings of warmth and safety, a dangerous smile can create apprehension or even fear. This can be a boon if you find yourself facing a particularly unpleasant person or coworker. This sort of smile usually will not reach your eyes, but leaves no doubt as to who is in charge in the current situation.

13 HONESTY

Honesty is often one of the largest barriers to effective communication, but it is one of the easiest to overcome. Effective communication is largely based on trust. You have to trust the person you are speaking with to provide the correct information in an easy to understand manner. You put your absolute trust in this person not to lead you astray. Honesty should be paramount in every single thing you do. In this case, it really is the best policy. If you feel the need to lie, for whatever reason, take a step back and remove yourself from the situation momentarily. Determine why you feel like you need to lie to your coworker or boss, and from there, you should be able to easily determine the correct course of action.

14 SPEAK EQUALLY

A good verbal communicator can speak to an auditorium full of people and have each one leave feeling like he or she was spoken too individually, or that the presentation was designed especially for them. This is the sort of skill level that you should strive to attain. The first step to doing this goes back to observation. Find a seminar or a class taught by a skilled communicator and observe the way he or she works with the audience. From there, you can take the things you have learned and implement them in your own communications.

15 NEVER STOP LEARNING

This is often the biggest mistake that people make when learning to properly communicate. They think that after they have become an effective communicator, there is nothing left for them to learn. Albert Einstein said it best: Once you stop learning, you start dying. There are new breakthroughs in the fields of communication every single day, as people discover new and more effective ways to do things. If you refuse to continue to learn, you will be left behind and you will find yourself unable to compete with those who have learned the new techniques. There is no skill on this Earth that can replace the ability to effectively communicate. These techniques and strategies will take some time to learn, but once you have mastered them, there will be nothing you cannot accomplish.

TAKE-HOME IMPRESSIONS

You are encouraged to fill out this handout after attending each meeting of this group. Doing this is optional, but it is designed to help you retain as much of what you learned in today's session as possible. In your own words, please answer the following prompts:

1. SOMETHING I LEARNED ABOUT TBI TODAY THAT I DID NOT KNOW BEFORE IS:

2. SOMETHING I LEARNED TODAY THAT I WANT TO SHARE WITH SOMEONE IN MY LIFE IS:

I will share this with: _____

because: _____

3. I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT:

4. ONE STRATEGY I LEARNED TODAY THAT I BELIEVE WILL HELP ME IS:

5. THESE ARE THREE SITUATIONS WHERE I CAN SEE MYSELF USING THAT STRATEGY/SKILL:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____