YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Do You Hear What I Mean?

Facilitator Guide

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT

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Do You Hear What I Mean?

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 (computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;
✋ (hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.

*Essential class content is noted in **bold**.*

All class handouts are available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified as online only in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class covers the importance of effective communication and discusses how to improve communication skills.

Stage:

Pre-deployment, During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Laptop
- PowerPoint

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Do You Hear What I Mean?
  2. Objectives
  3. Communication
  4. Self-Reflection Exercise
  5. You- vs. I-Statements
  6. Practicing I-Statements
  7. Complaints vs. Criticisms
  8. Active Listening
  9. The Speaker-Listener Technique
  10. Review of Objectives
  11. Do You Hear What I Mean?
- Handouts
  1. Self-Reflection Exercise
  2. Speaker-Listener Technique Exercise

Exercises:

1. Self-Reflection
2. The Speaker-Listener Technique

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Define effective communication.
2. Identify effective communication strategies.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Do You Hear What I Mean?

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

The interactions that we have with others can impact our lives significantly. **Quality social interactions are associated with increased happiness, better physical health, and even longer life** (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Milek et al., 2018; Zhaoyang et al., 2019). Engaging in quality social relationships may have a similar effect on our life expectancy as stopping a bad habit could, like quitting smoking (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Even the small act of having a friendly interaction when checking out at a coffee shop may improve your mood (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014; Zhaoyang et al., 2019).

Welcome to the class Do You Hear What I Mean? Communication is part of our everyday lives. We talk to people and listen to what they say many times a day in face-to-face contact, phone calls, email, text messages, and social media accounts. Our channels of communication continue to expand.

Remember, people will attribute meaning to almost anything we say or do. **Whether intentional or not, our actions have meanings to those around us** (Burgoon et al., 2016; Watzlawick et al., 1967). For example, you may stay silent during a meeting because you do not have additional information to contribute, but your silence can be interpreted by someone else as boredom, or you are uncomfortable with what is being discussed.

To communicate effectively, you must be able to “articulate thoughts and ideas effectively” and “listen effectively to decipher meaning” (National Research Council, 2011, p. 40). This sounds simple, but it is not always easy to do.

Effective communication is key to the success of our relationships, careers, and other aspects of our lives (Carroll et al., 2013; Gottman, 1994; Knobloch et al., 2016). Think about how many times in a day you communicate! When we communicate poorly, we may struggle. Therefore, it is important to understand and practice the components of

effective communication.

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

Let's go over our objectives. At the end of this class, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define effective communication.
2. Identify effective communication strategies.

SHOW Slide 3: Communication

Let's start by looking at some definitions of communication. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the definition of communication is "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior."

Another, more in-depth definition specifically involves interpersonal communication. One can define interpersonal communication as **"a strategic process of message transaction between two people to create and sustain shared meaning**" (West & Turner, 2020, p. 7). For example, we talk to people to take action, such as explain an idea, offer advice, get help, cheer someone up, resolve a disagreement, make a good first impression, or let them know we are thinking about them.

Regardless of the exact definition referenced, the point is that communication includes sending and receiving messages. Now, let's look at some other aspects of communication.

There are **two levels to consider in terms of messages: content-level and relationship-level messages**. **Content-level messages are the information and words you communicate and how you communicate them** (Watzlawick et al., 1967; West, & Turner, 2020).

Relationship-level messages, on the other hand, **are those that convey how the message may be intended depending on the relationship between the people sending and receiving the message** (Watzlawick et al., 1967; West & Turner, 2020).

For example, the same information can be intended but may be interpreted very differently depending on the relationship between people and non-verbal signals. For example, if your boss tells you something is important, the message may hold more significance than if a co-worker says the same thing. If you ask a romantic partner if he or she is frustrated with you and he or she responds tensely with "I'm fine," the message "I'm fine" may mean something very different than if your partner says, "I'm fine" with a smile and a laugh.

Some partners may argue about using the laundry basket as opposed to leaving dirty clothes on the floor. The *content* is whether or not the clothes are placed in the laundry basket, but the *relationship* message may be something like “You are being inconsiderate by not thinking about how your behavior affects me.” In other words, the argument is about more than whether the laundry basket is utilized.

Another example is the short-hand messages you develop with friends, where you may say little but actually say a lot. For instance, if your friend notices you are stressed and asks, “What’s up?,” you may reply, “Work,” which is the *content* message. Your friend, however, because of your *relationship* knows that “work” translates to “my boss is being unreasonable again, and it took everything I had not to just quit on the spot.”

Why do you think it is important to attend to both the content and the relationship in communication?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: you need the content to get the message but understanding the relationship ensures the content is communicated clearly and effectively; it helps to connect the sender and receiver of the message; you don’t want the receiver to misinterpret the message you are actually intending to send)

What are some examples of when content and relationship messages differed?

PAUSE for responses.

Now, let’s assess our individual communication skills.

Communication Self-Reflection

SHOW Slide 4: Self-Reflection Exercise

EXERCISE 1: Self-Reflection

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to self-reflect on the effectiveness of their interpersonal communication skills. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

Please locate **Handout 1: Self-Reflection Exercise**.

These statements were taken from a larger questionnaire (Buhrmester et al., 1988) and are designed to help you think about how comfortable you are communicating in

different situations.

Please read each statement, and think about how skilled you are and how comfortable you feel in handling each of the given situations. This is an individual exercise.

The following statements are provided on the handout.

1. *Introducing yourself to someone you might like to get to know (or date).*
2. *Saying "no" when someone asks you to do something you don't want to do.*
3. *Letting someone get to know the "real you."*
4. *Being able to patiently and sensitively listen to someone (e.g., friend, romantic partner) let off steam about outside problems he or she is having.*
5. *When angry with someone (e.g., friend, romantic partner), being able to accept that he or she has a valid point of view even if you don't agree with that view.*

STOP the exercise after 5 minutes, and ask the following questions. PAUSE for responses after each question.

Which scenarios do you feel you would be most comfortable handling?

Are there any situations in which you were very uncomfortable at some point in your life, but, now, you feel more comfortable?

Are any of these scenarios/areas in which you would like to improve?

Communication Skills

💻 SHOW Slide 5: You- vs. I-Statements

In order for communication to be effective, we must choose our words and nonverbal cues carefully. In creating an environment conducive to effective communication, especially in conflict situations, **it is important to avoid language or mannerisms that can be perceived as attacking**. This is true for many types of relationships, so we'll look at different types of examples as we move through the rest of this class.

How do you feel when someone says to you, "You are not listening to what I'm saying"?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: attacked; defensive; upset)

You-statements often come across as critical and attacking. When people feel attacked, they often feel defensive, deny wrongdoing, shift the blame, or shut down (Biesen et al., 2016; Gottman, 1994). For example, "You broke your promise" may elicit a likely answer of "No, I didn't." This sets you up for a lengthy argument. "You

broke your promise" could also elicit a response of, "Well you did, too." This type of wording could escalate the conflict.

I-statements can be especially helpful when there is a need to discuss a problem (Burr, 1990; Rogers et al., 2018). I-statements simply state a problem and focus on how you experienced the situation; therefore, people are less likely to feel attacked and defensive. This approach makes it easier for the other person to help solve the problem.

By using I-statements instead of you-statements, choosing words wisely, and paying attention to nonverbal cues, we can avoid putting those with whom we are communicating on the defensive (Kubany et al., 1992; Kubany et al., 1995; Rogers et al., 2018).

I-statements focus on the speaker's feelings about a specified behavior without attacking or blaming others. These statements "locate the feelings or concerns inside the person who is making the statement" (Burr, 1990, p. 266).

Here are a few tips when using I-statements. **Make sure I-statements are specific.** Start with the specific situation you are referencing. **Be as objective as possible, and avoid words like never or always because these words create a bigger and less specific situation. Then, follow the first part of the sentence with the emotion you are feeling. One model for an I-statement follows:**

When _____, I feel _____.

Here are **some examples of I-statements**.

- **"When we walk into an event late, I feel embarrassed and disappointed in myself."**
- **"When I get excited about something and plans fall through, I feel disappointed and frustrated."**
- "When I can't get in touch with you, I feel anxious."

In these examples, the point of view of the speaker is shared without placing blame or attacking others.

Incorporating positive aspects and components into the conversation can further reduce defensiveness from the receiver of the message. For example, you may want to find a way to also express appreciation for the person (e.g., **"I really appreciate that you want to hang out with me, but when...**").

As we move toward practicing I-statements and other communication techniques, keep track of whether the strategies work for you, and keep in mind that your conversational partner needs to be a willing participant.

SHOW Slide 6: Practicing I-Statements

Let's practice I-statements. For the following you-statement examples, try making the same point using an I-statement.

1. **"All you care about is hanging out with your friends."**

   ASK for examples of "When _____"

   (Possible answers: When you spend most Saturdays with your friends; When you go right from dinner to the Xbox; When you go to the gym instead of spending time with the kids before bed)

   ASK for examples of "I feel _____"

   (Possible answers: I feel ignored; I feel sad; I feel unimportant)

2. **"You never come to my important events. How could you miss my promotion ceremony?"**

   ASK for an example of "When _____"

   (Possible answers: When you didn't come to my promotion ceremony; When I looked for you at the ceremony and you weren't there; When you told me you weren't coming to my promotion ceremony)

   ASK for an example of "I feel/I felt _____"

   (Possible answers: I felt unimportant; I felt angry and disappointed; I felt unsupported)

3. **"You don't care about how hard this has been for me."**

   ASK for an example of "When _____"

   (Possible answers: When I am juggling household responsibilities; When you are gone)

   ASK for examples of "I feel _____"

   (Possible answers: I feel overwhelmed; I feel lonely; I feel sad)

4. **"You never help out around the house."**

   ASK for an example of "When _____"

(Possible answers: When I need to cook, clean, and take care of the kids; When I spend my entire Sunday cleaning up the house)

ASK for examples of "I feel _____"

(Possible answers: I feel overwhelmed; I feel angry; I feel resentful)

5. **"All you care about is work."**

   ASK for an example of "When _____"

   (Possible answers: When I spent every evening alone this week; When you are on your phone all the time; When the kids complain that they don't get to spend time with you)

   ASK for examples of "I feel _____"

   (Possible answers: I feel sad; I feel angry; I feel resentful)

I-statements take a little practice, but using them may help improve your communication success. They are a good technique to help us choose our words wisely. Keep in mind that I-statements don't have to follow the "When ____, I feel ____" model. Other examples include "I feel ____ when ____." and "I feel ____." Regardless of the exact statement used, the goal in using I-statements is to focus on your personal feelings and experiences and communicate the point without placing blame.

SHOW Slide 7: Complaints vs. Criticisms

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be reviewed. This should take approximately 2 minutes.

Another related skill pertaining to communication involves understanding the difference between complaints and criticisms. According to researchers, **"A complaint focuses on a specific behavior, while a criticism attacks the character of the person"** (Honeycutt, 2015, p. 169).

Here is an example of the difference between a complaint and a criticism.

Complaint: "You told me yesterday that you didn't want to go to the movies on Friday night like we planned. I'm disappointed because I thought it would be fun for us to get out of the house and do something together now that you're home from deployment."

Criticism: "Why are you changing our plans for Friday? It's selfish of you, especially since you just got home after being gone the past 6 months. If you didn't want to go, you shouldn't have told me you did, and we shouldn't have made plans. You always do this!"

Did you notice a difference in how these two interactions were handled?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the complaint seemed like a more respectful approach to the situation; the complaint did not place blame on the other person; the criticism states "you always do this," which is not focused on the specific situation and may lead to an overly defensive response)

How might you **change the following criticisms into complaints**?

1. **"You never get to work on time! You are so unreliable!"**

   *PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **I've noticed that you've been late getting into work recently; is everything OK?; I was disappointed when you were late to work because I felt like it made us look unorganized in front of our customers**; next time you are going to be late to work, please let me know so we can make adjustments if needed)*

2. **"You always come to my house with your friend. You know that I can't stand him!"**

   *PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **I enjoy you coming over to my house, but I would love for you to come alone and visit with just me; it would really mean a lot to me if you came over alone, so we could really enjoy each other's company**; it's awkward for me when your friend is here because I don't really get along with him or her)*

3. **"We never have money because you waste it on stupid stuff!"**

   *PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **I was upset when you bought a T.V. without discussing it first with me; I felt like my opinion should have also been considered in the decision-making process since we share finances**; I'm disappointed that you bought new golf clubs because I thought we had decided to try to save money)*

How do you think that using complaints instead of criticisms would benefit your communication with people in your life?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the receiver of the message may not get as defensive; the sender of the message may not come across as attacking the character of the receiver of the message; this technique can help communication during conflict

be more productive)

Please refer to **Handout 1: Self-Reflection Exercise**, and look at statements 4 and 5. Do you tend to resort to criticisms when in conflict with a companion? How might using complaints help you handle these scenarios more effectively?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: criticism may make the conflict escalate more than complaints might; complaints may show the receiver of the message that you are listening to his or her point of view; complaints can be used to avoid global accusations)

When using I-statements, be sure to focus on complaints rather than criticisms. In addition, it is important, as the sender of the I-statement, that you also actively listen to the person receiving the message and try to understand the message he or she is relaying to you.

SHOW Slide 8: Active Listening

Active listening leads to the perception that the person sending a message is being understood by the receiver of the message. This may improve the communication process. In this section, we are going to discuss active listening and how it can improve your communication skills.

Active listening is a multi-step process that "involves restating a paraphrased version of the speaker's message, asking questions when appropriate, and maintaining moderate to high nonverbal conversational involvement" (Weger et al., 2014, p. 14). **One strategy that may help you with active listening and communicating about difficult topics safely and respectfully is the Speaker-Listener Technique** (Allen et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 1997; Weger et al., 2014).

The core of this skill is that only one person has the floor at any given time. The speaker first makes a point, preferably using I-statements. Before the speaker goes onto his or her next point or the listener interrupts with a response, the listener gives a summary or paraphrases the speaker's point. If needed, the speaker can clarify or repeat information until the speaker has made his or her point and, then, individuals switch who the speaker is and who the listener is.

SHOW Slide 9: The Speaker-Listener Technique

EXERCISE 2: The Speaker-Listener Technique

Facilitator Note:

Handout 2 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to explore and practice the Speaker-Listener Technique. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

Please locate **Handout 2: Speaker-Listener Technique Exercise**. This handout contains an example of the Speaker-Listener Technique. **Remember, this is not a way to communicate most of the time, but, rather, it is a way to communicate when dealing with a difficult topic. When initially practicing this technique, consider starting with easier topics before moving on to more challenging ones** (Allen et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 1997; Weger et al., 2014).

Before starting the exercise, make sure to review the "Rules" section. With a partner or someone sitting near you, please appoint one person to read each role. When you are finished with the "Initial Interaction" section, switch roles, and continue reading.

PAUSE for 5 minutes and, then, ask the participants to come up with their own scenario to work through.

The following information is listed on the handout (Allen, et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 1997; Weger et al., 2014):

Rules:

1. *The speaker is the one with the floor. As a speaker, remember to use an I-statement to start the conversation. If you do not have the floor, you are the listener. The speaker keeps the floor until he or she has finished speaking.*
2. *Share the floor throughout a conversation. One individual has the floor to start, and he or she speaks. Then, the opportunity to speak passes to the listener, who, at this point, becomes the speaker. Switch roles and continue.*
3. *Do not try to problem-solve. Focus on having a positive discussion. This rule is crucial to keeping the discussion on track.*
4. *Stay on one subject at a time, and try not to talk about several topics at once.*
5. *You can stop the discussion flow for a moment to clarify an idea or specific wording or if you and your partner experience a problem. Do not stop the conversation and talk about what each participant is doing wrong.*
6. *Stop or use a "time out" if needed. Choose a signal to stop the exercise if you feel the discussion is are getting out of hand or you have a question about the techniques or if you and your partner need to get back on track with using these*

rules.

Initial Interaction

- ***Speaker:*** *When you didn't come to my promotion ceremony, I felt disrespected and angry. [speaking with an I-statement]*
- ***Listener****: You really wanted me to come yesterday, and, when I didn't, you were upset.*
- ***Speaker****: I wasn't just upset. All of the others had their partners there to pin them. I was the only one whose spouse didn't show up. And, my commander was there, so I looked bad.*
- ***Listener:*** *So, you were upset and disappointed that I didn't come. And. because this happened in front of your commander and the others getting promoted, you felt disrespected and undermined.*
- ***Speaker****: Exactly. I wanted you there regardless but feeling like an idiot in front of the others made it 100 times worse.*
- ***Listener****: It was important to you for multiple reasons. [speaker nods]. Is there anything I missed? [speaker shakes head].*

Speaker and Listener Switch

- ***New Speaker****: I'm really sorry that I didn't come. When you mentioned it offhand, I genuinely didn't realize that it was such a big thing. So when I had the chance to get overtime and put more money in to our vacation fund, I figured you would have wanted me to say yes.*
- ***New Listener****: You didn't know that the promotion ceremonies can be a big to-do. You thought you were doing the right thing by getting extra money for our vacation.*
- ***New Speaker:*** *Yes. If I realized that it was so important to you and your career, I would not have worked the overtime. I just don't know anything about this military stuff.*
- ***New Listener****: You would have made a different decision if you had realized this event was such a big deal.*

Now, come up with your own scenario that you want to discuss. To begin, try to identify an easy topic that has been successfully resolved in the past.

STOP the exercise after 5 minutes and ask the participants the following question:

How can this technique be helpful in ensuring active listening, particularly in stressful situations?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: it can help with misunderstandings; it can be used to express interest in the well-being of all involved).

Once both parties have a good understanding of the challenge, problem-solving can

begin.

Remember, life is often less predictable than training contexts. **If emotions get out of control, sometimes, the most effective strategy is to walk away from the conversation until both parties are ready to constructively reengage** (Choudhary & Thapa, 2012; Heyman et al., 2012; Valentine et al., 2014).

Summary

SHOW Slide 10: Review of Objectives

Effective communication takes effort and practice. It combines a set of skills that includes using I-statements, complaints rather than criticism, and active listening techniques. The more effort and practice you put into developing effective communication skills, the more successful you may be when communicating with others.

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What is a good definition of effective communication?** *PAUSE for responses*.
   (Possible answer: a strategic process of message transaction between two people to create and sustain shared meaning)

2. **What are some components or techniques for effective communication?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: sending and receiving messages that have both content-level and relationship-level messages; I-statements; discussing complaints rather than criticisms; active listening, the Speaker-Listener Technique, walking away)

SHOW Slide 11: Do You Hear What I Mean?

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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