



# IMPROVING COMMUNICATION: HOW TO SEND MESSAGES

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

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After completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Explain the importance of how messages are delivered.
- Describe and give examples of open and closed communication.
- Recognize dogmatic, commando, and grandiose wording.
- Use “I” statements, tentative words and phrases, and qualifiers to change the closed style of communication to an open one.
- List and describe dimensions of effective expression.
- Recognize metamesages.
- Define and realize the importance of both paralanguage and body language.

*The “how” of communication is as meaningful as the “what.”*

—Sharon Hanna

In all interactions, information and meaning are communicated. Often overlooked are the manner and method of delivery, yet they are equally critical in the communication process. This chapter will focus on improving how messages are delivered both verbally and nonverbally. Specifically covered will be openness, effectiveness, paralanguage, and body language.

## **Improving Your Verbalizing Style**

Have you ever thought about the way you deliver your thoughts, feelings, and needs? **Style** refers to how a person verbalizes. A particular style influences how the speaker comes across and usually elicits a certain response. Communication styles can be identified and changed.

Pretend you are the listener in the following conversations and assess each one in terms of your reactions:

1. The supervisor does not care how well I do my job. The only thing she thinks about is how much money the company makes. She puts so much pressure on

everyone and never says we are doing good work. You are crazy to ask to be transferred over here.

2. I get the impression that the supervisor is not very interested in how well I do my job. It seems to me that her major concern is how much money the company makes. We feel a lot of pressure from her, and I hardly ever hear her tell us we are doing good work. I do not think you would like to work here.

Essentially, the same message was delivered. Yet, if you are like most people, your reaction to each would have been different. In the first one, the speaker is using the **closed style of verbalizing**. This means that the comments are definite and, if the listener disagrees, leave little opportunity for a reasonable response. The closed style, because of its absoluteness, finality, forcefulness, and all-inclusive/exclusive language, stifles positive exchange. The closed style fosters a negative communication climate. Opinions stated as inflexible truths invariably close the door to open communication.

In the second example the **open style of verbalizing** is used, and discussion is encouraged. A point of view is stated in a flexible manner. Because the expressed ideas sound open, they invite a reasonable, positive response. Open communicators are refreshing! Rather than offending or turning others off, open communicators attract people and are more likely to develop and maintain positive relationships. The old adage "It's not what you say, but how you say it" has a great deal of merit.

### Closed and Open Communication

Awareness of the closed style and recognition of its use is the first step toward becoming an open communicator. Following are descriptions of three types of closed communication and ways to change to the open style.

1. *Dogmatic*—"definitely definite," rigid, absolute, and inflexible. When verbalizing, a dogmatic communicator sounds like the final authority. A key measure of dogmatism is closed-mindedness (Vogt, 1997), and in verbalization this comes across as *expression of opinion as fact or truth*. Here are some dogmatic statements:

"The weather is lousy" or "It is a beautiful day today."

"Valentino's has the best pizza in the world" or "Valentino's has the worst pizza in the world."

"He has been a very ineffective president" or "He has been an excellent president."

"Religion is necessary for a happy life" or "It is not necessary to be religious to be happy."

TABLE 8-1	Actual "I" Statements		
I think	I like	I want	
I believe	I consider	I feel	
I feel that	I prefer	I am or was	
Note: An opposite could be made of each by inserting don't or another appropriate word.			

In my opinion	In my way of thinking
As far as I am concerned	My thoughts are
It seems to me	To me it appears

How a comment is stated, not its content, makes it dogmatic. Each example expresses an opinion; yet it comes across as the "way it is" (Table 8-1).

**Using "I" statements.** The basic technique of open-style communication is to rid yourself of dogmatic comments by the use of "I" statements. Because you are speaking for yourself, "I" statements are also regarded as assertive language and are self-empowering. "I" statements are less inflammatory, put responsibility on the speaker, and are much more likely to be heard (McKay, Fanning, and Paleg, 1994).

"I" statements can be divided into two categories. The first group consists of phrases known as actual "I" statements. The word "I" is said first or begins a phrase used elsewhere in the sentence (see Table 8-1). The second category is made up of phrases that give an "I" meaning. These, too, demonstrate that the speaker's opinions do not necessarily take precedence over others (see Table 8-2).

A common error is to use "I know" for "I think" such as "I know students do better in smaller classes." The speaker does not *know* this. Only when a fact is being stated would "I know" be correct.

Following are rewordings of the dogmatic statements made earlier.

"I like (or do not like) the weather."

"As far as I am concerned, Valentino's has the best (or worst) pizza in the world."

"In my opinion, religion is necessary (or not necessary) for a happy life."

Remember that "I" statements are not necessary in all verbalizations. When you express facts, they certainly are not. My dad expressed many of his opinions in a dogmatic way. I suggested that others would react much more positively to him if he used "I" statements. He "leaped" into this in his usual enthusiastic fashion, and it was as if the three words "in my opinion" gave him freedom to say anything. In his zeal, he used the phrase frequently. One day he came into the house and said, "It is raining outside," and then, looking directly at me, added, "in my opinion." I hurriedly explained that when expressing a fact, "I" statements are not necessary! Also, simple dogmatic observations such as "That is interesting" are seldom considered offensive.

To become an open communicator, listen for your dogmatic statements and concentrate on using "I" statements. A world of difference exists, *in my opinion*, between saying, "College does not prepare you for the real world" and "I think that college experiences rarely prepare you for what goes on in the world." Remember that you affirm yourself when you express opinions in an open style.

2. *Commando*—forcing, pressuring. This category includes words and phrases such as "should," "have to," "must," "ought," and "need to" that leave little, if any, opportunity for alternatives. Note the authoritarian, commanding nature of these statements:

“You must get a job.”  
 “She should listen better.”  
 “You had better take my advice.”

Consider how you react to forcing words, especially when they are preceded by the word “you.” Defensively? In a study, adolescents described accusatory “you” statements as likely to evoke stronger antagonistic responses than assertive “I” statements. The teenagers reported that the use of “you” with angry messages increased their hostile responses and provoked resistance and rebellion (Kubany et al., 1992). When people speak in a “commando” way, reactions of defiance, resentment, or passivity are possible; none would appear to be healthy and positive. The “commando” type is usually expressed dogmatically as well, which obviously makes such statements sound even more closed. This style may remind you of moralizing, which was discussed in Chapter 3. Moralizers make use of commando-type words.

**Being tentative and flexible.** When the “commando” type has been used, first check to see whether the statement is also dogmatic. If so, create an “I” statement and then replace the forcing part with a flexible and tentative phrase. See Table 8-3 for examples.

Following are changes in the “commando” statements given previously.

“I think it would be a good idea for you to get a job.”  
 “I believe she would benefit from listening better.”  
 “It seems to me that my advice could be helpful to you.”

The forcing words “should,” “must,” “has to,” and “had better” were replaced with tentative phrases, and “I” statements were used. The same point is made in a less demanding way.

3. *Grandiose*—exaggerated, all-inclusive or all-exclusive, and often dramatic. The use of this type can lead to inaccuracy or a distortion of the facts. Following are examples of grandiose words and statements in which they are expressed:

everyone—no one  
 everybody—nobody  
 all—none  
 always—never  
 everything—nothing—anything  
 only  
 every

TABLE 8-3	Some Tentative Phrases
	It would be a good idea if
	He or she, they, or you could benefit from
	It could be helpful if
	It seems important that
	He or she, they, or you might be wise to

“All kids today are disrespectful.”

“She is always late.”

“The only way to become skilled in word processing is to take a class.”

“I do not have anything to wear.”

Consider a statement such as: “Everybody’s having kids.” My quick reaction is, “I am not!” Note that grandiose statements are almost always (not always) dogmatic.

A statement that contains grandiose words is usually inaccurate. How often is “always” correct? Be careful you do not answer that with “never.”

At times, “always” is accurate. Years ago I suggested the possible elimination of the words “always” and “never” from the language until Ed, a good friend, reminded me of their accuracy in certain statements. He noted that the Pope is always Catholic and never Jewish! In most cases, grandiose words are used only for their dramatic effect. Yet, because they usually create an inaccurate statement, the point can be lost. Parents are advised not to say to a child, “Your room is always a mess” or “You never clean your room.” Why? The child can clean once in a five-year period and prove that you are wrong!

Listening for examples of the grandiose style from others as well as yourself can actually be fun. Keeping a sense of humor, you can challenge the obvious inaccuracy of such comments. Try inwardly responding to the suggestions in parentheses when you hear these types of statements:

“All men are that way.” (All? Really?)

“You never do anything right.” (Surely once in a while the person does!)

“All he does is eat.” (That’s all he does? Amazing!)

“I’m always late.” (Not even once are you on time?)

Depending on your relationship with the grandiose speaker, you may be able to verbalize these questions. When students say, “There was *no* way I could have come to class,” I try to humorously challenge them! Awareness is the first step toward improvement.

**Adding or replacing with qualifiers.** To correct the “grandiose” type, an “I” statement may be needed to get rid of dogmatism. Then replace or modify the grandiose word with a qualifier (see Table 8-4). For example, if “always” or “never” has been used, ask “Is the word correct?” If not, select a qualifier that does not change the meaning to any extent. In the statement “She is always late,” what word could be used to qualify “always”? Some possibilities are “often” or “hardly ever” as replacements or adding “almost” in front of “always” as a modifier. Be

almost	quite a few	frequently	infrequently
nearly	probably	often	rarely
many	possibly	usually	seldom
most	some	generally	sometimes
several	few	in general	hardly ever

**Can You Find All Three Closed Types?**

“Politicians should tell the truth, and they never do.”

“You ought to save part of your paycheck.”

“Students need to study hard to get good grades.”

How well did you do? All are dogmatic because they express opinion as fact. Did you find the forcing words (*should*, *ought*, and *need to*)? In addition, politicians and students with an implied “all,” and the word “only” are grandiose. Don’t the following reworded statements sound open and positive?

Figure 8-1

careful that you do not change the meaning to any great extent. For example, if you are rewording “Everyone is so rude,” the meaning would be significantly changed if you replaced “everyone” (the grandiose word) with “someone.” Instead, use “many people” or add “almost” to “everyone.” Some possible open statements are “I have noticed that she is rarely on time” and “It seems to me that most people are rude.”

Using qualifiers makes statements accurate and less hurtful. A young man said that his father repeatedly told him, “You will never amount to anything.” “Never” and “anything” felt like arrows accentuating the attack on his self-esteem (Fig. 8-1.) Qualifiers decrease the sting of a critical remark. Again, compare the statements that follow with the ones given in the description of the grandiose type.

“In my opinion, many kids today are disrespectful.”

“It seems to me that she is often late.”

“I found that taking a class in word processing really improved my skill, and I would recommend it.”

“I do not have many things to wear.”

These reworded statements are accurate, less dramatic, and open. Note that each is an “I” statement. All three types of the closed style set up obstacles to communicating effectively. Either they stop communication or, if exchange does take place, disagreement or combativeness is apt to occur. Statements that contain all three types are not unusual. In a book written for teenagers in stepfamilies (Getzoff and McClenahan, 1984), closed communication, called aggressive language, is associated with responses of defensiveness, attack, or resentment. None solves a problem (Fig. 8-2).

**Can You Create Open Communication?**

“In my opinion, most politicians hardly ever tell the truth, and I think it would be much better if they did.”

“I believe that it’s a good idea to save part of your paycheck.”

“I think that most students who study hard can get good grades.”

Figure 8-2

Open communication is worth the time and effort spent in developing the techniques. The first step in becoming an open communicator is a desire. The second requires listening to your usual style. Then rewording mentally and restating aloud will complete the process. Accomplishment comes from practice and more practice! To help, **Reflections and Applications** asks you to identify and rewrite closed statements. Eventually, open communication will become easy and natural.

## Becoming an Effective Communicator

In addition to using an open style, you can improve communication by expressing yourself effectively. This can be accomplished by paying attention to certain guidelines (McKay, Davis, and Fanning, 1983).

### Directness

Being direct means stating what you want to say. You do not assume that others know what you are thinking or feeling. People, often those with a feeling personality preference, may not say what they mean because they do not want to offend others. Yet indirectness can cause deeper hurt. For example, since her parents' divorce, Tiffany had spent two months each summer visiting her dad. One summer she did not want to stay the full time, yet she was concerned about hurting his feelings. Because she was not direct with her dad, she stayed and felt resentful, causing their relationship to become distant. This hurt both of them. Other reasons for indirectness are indecisiveness, shyness, and nonassertiveness. "We cannot hear what the other is not saying; and, sometimes, when we finally do, it is too late" (Buscaglia, 1992, p. 152). A message worth sending deserves to be delivered directly.

### Straightforwardness

Related to directness is straightforwardness, which means being honest and not disguising information or intention. A **metamessage** is one in which the true meaning is not openly expressed. Instead, an underlying message is transmitted by accenting a word, changing the tone of voice, or making suggestive comments. For example, if a person says, "*Obviously*, you're right," the real meaning probably is, "You act like you are always right." A metamessage is often sarcastic. Note the following metamessages and the possible intended meanings.

"She must have really been an interesting person to talk with."

(Meaning: I was hurt that you spent so much time talking to her.)

"Do not worry about being out of town when we have the graduation party. We will manage without you."

(Meaning: I am unhappy that you will not be here.)

Instead of using a metamessage, either be straightforward, say what you mean, or just keep silent. In the next chapter you will learn how to respond to metamessages effectively; you undoubtedly know someone who uses them!

## Clarity

Effectiveness calls for the delivery of a clear message. Individuals who say “I feel funny” or “There is something wrong” are not being clear. Another example is the practice of asking a question when a statement would be more effective. For example, “Why don’t you try harder?” would be much clearer as: “I have noticed you have not been turning in as many projects of high quality lately, and I would like you to try harder.” Simple requests may be harmless. Lack of clarity and confusion can lead to serious relationship problems. For example, what does “I will call you later” mean? It could be 15 minutes in one person’s mind and a week in another’s. Abstract words such as *love*, *trust*, *loyalty*, and *honesty* often have different meanings for people. What does respect mean to you? Ask a few others and see if meanings are the same. A couple was having an argument. She said, “I just wanted you to be honest with me.” He replied, “I was honest. I did not lie to you.” Her comment was, “You may not have lied; however, you did not tell me all about it, and that’s dishonest!” Do you see how their meaning of honesty was different? To avoid this, effective communicators do more than use a word; they describe, behaviorally if possible, exactly what they mean.

Another problem with clarity comes when someone says one thing and indicates another with body language. “I am listening!” she says as she continues to write a letter. How do you know which to believe? Effective communicators strive for clarity. “A message clearly given that is clearly received is a rare and beautiful phenomenon” (Adams, 1987, p. 135).

## Supportiveness

Effectiveness is not enhanced by hurting someone or trying to appear superior. Nonsupportive communication includes using sarcasm, calling attention to past errors and problems, comparing others unfavorably, attacking in a judgmental way, and delivering threats. Effective communicators are not out to prove points or win; instead they want to be supportive and promote understanding and goodwill.

## Efficiency and Sharing

Effective communication is damaged by using fillers, adding unnecessary details, meandering, and monopolizing the conversation. What creates a barrier in the following?

“Well, you know, I go to college, you know, and it has been a good experience, you know. I have really, you know, learned a lot, you know, and I think you oughta well basically, you know, try it!”

Is there any doubt? The filler “you know” is heard in all walks of life from the playground to the corporation boardroom. A **filler** is a word, phrase, or sound used for no reason except to replace silence. Other common ones are “basically,” and saying “right?” after every statement such as “I went to the movies last night, right? There was this guy there, right? And he struck up a conversation with me,



right?” How many other types of filler can you identify? Overuse of any word or expression gives people a reason not to listen. An effective communicator eliminates fillers. A speech class can do wonders in this regard. Another idea is to ask someone else to catch you using the filler.

An efficient speaker reaches the point with only interesting details so that listeners are not frustrated or bored. For example, let’s listen to two people tell about their vacation.

SPEAKER 1: We left last Monday morning.

SPEAKER 2: No, it was after lunch.

SPEAKER 1: No, it was morning because it was before the mail came.

SPEAKER 2: I know we left in the afternoon. Don’t you remember that we got an invitation to a wedding reception and knew we could not go because we’d be on vacation?

SPEAKER 1: No, we got that invitation the day before. We stopped for lunch in Platte City, or was it North Platte? I think it was North Platte. Do you remember?

SPEAKER 2: No, I just know we left after lunch!

If you are smiling, this probably reminds you of someone. The disagreement is annoying, as is the length of the story with the unnecessary details!

Have you ever been engaged in a conversation with a person who did almost all the talking? People who monopolize conversations by either telling one story after another, repeating stories, or giving you endless accounts of themselves and others they know are ineffective and annoying. In fact, such an individual could rightly be described as a poor communicator. Efficiency and give- and-take in conversation are most appreciated.

Effective communication takes practice. To achieve your purpose, follow the guidelines of effective expression and use open communication.

## Recognizing the Importance of Paralanguage and Body Language

The “how” of communicating is greatly influenced by other factors. In fact, about 93 percent of an expression is conveyed by vocal changes and nonverbal behaviors and not by the words alone (Mehrabian, 1968, 1981). Becoming aware of paralanguage and body language and learning how to use yours effectively are valuable tools in communication.

### What Is Paralanguage?

A vital part of meaning is conveyed by **paralanguage**, the vocal changes or variations in the human voice. Paralanguage has several components.

**Rhythm.** When emphasis or accent is placed on different words, rhythm varies. In the phrase “It seems to me,” if you accent *seems*, you are giving the impression of openness; if you emphasize *me*, you have defeated that purpose.

Rhythm can be used in a negative way to convey sarcasm and criticism. For example, “Oh, no. You did not say *that!*” can sound critical.

**Inflection and pitch.** Inflection is a change in pitch or in tone of voice. Pitch ranges from low to high, and people have varying degrees of natural voice tone. In normal conversation, positive communicators will vary their pitch purposefully; for example, when asking a question, pitch usually rises. Depression or physical fatigue can create a lower voice. Altering rhythm, inflection, and pitch can make a major difference. Note the variations that change the meaning of the same series of words.

You received an award.  
 You received an *award!*  
 You received an award?

Robert Frost, the famous poet, said, “There are tones of voice that mean more than words.” Listening to the variations in your own voice and, at times, recording yourself can be very helpful. You may be expressing more than you realize!

**Volume.** Loudness or softness of speech changes the meaning and can create a dramatic effect. A professor told a group of aspiring teachers that in order to get the attention of noisy students, they should whisper; this, she contended, would quiet them faster than a loud voice. I can honestly report that whispering has worked for me, and then again, it has not! It depended on the group of students and the specific situation. Regardless of its effectiveness in quieting others, varying the volume of expression can add interest and meaning to your speech.

**Speed.** The rate at which one speaks makes a difference in the degree of understanding as well as the interest level of the receiver. People who talk very fast are often misunderstood, or they tend to overwhelm the listener. In contrast, a slow speaker can easily put others to sleep or create a great deal of frustration! Again, variety and appropriateness are important.

**Articulation.** “What did you say?” The question is often asked because of poor articulation. A speaker mumbled and was not understood. Enunciation, or distinct pronunciation, is a necessary element in delivering a clear message; however, you can overenunciate and give an unfavorable impression. If problems exist in this area, awareness and practice can be beneficial.

### Effects of Paralanguage

Paralanguage adds meaning to what you say and makes you a more interesting speaker. Because of paralanguage, you can seem insensitive or be hurtful. You can also sound warm and caring. If you want to realize the profound effects of paralanguage, try expressing a few thoughts or feelings without any variation in your voice.

At times, certain paralanguage usages are demeaning. You probably will, or already do, engage in conversation with elderly people in a work or personal setting. Speaking softly and slowly and articulating dramatically, as if the receiver were incapable of understanding, is unnecessary in many cases and can diminish the self-esteem of the elderly person. I was delighted one day when an older friend of mine told a young receptionist, "I am quite capable of understanding you if you speak to me exactly as you did to the last patient!" You may not be made aware of this habit as the receptionist was; it is up to you to become more aware of how you sound to others.

### Components of Body Language

**Body language** consists of nonverbal communication and, by itself, may make up as much as 55 percent of the meaning of a message (Mehrabian, 1968, 1981). Think of times when what was expressed by body language carried more impact than the person's words. Misinterpretation is common. For example, Steve was surprised and dismayed when Melissa frowned, tossed her head, and turned away. "Why are you mad?" he asked. Her reply was, "Mad? I just remembered a phone call I was going to make." Three areas of body language can be monitored and analyzed.

**Body movements.** Facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and other body parts can vary immensely while verbalizing. Animated is a positive way to describe a face. I received a wonderful compliment when I asked my class how they could tell that I enjoyed teaching. One student quickly replied, "It shows all over your face during class."

How often have you "read" someone's eyes? They, too, are capable of expression. The eyes have been called "the mirror of the soul." According to one expert on body language, it is not the eye itself that creates expression but the length of the glance, the extent of the opening of the eyelids, and the manipulations of the skin around the eyes (Fast, 1970).

Even less expressive eyes can be a positive factor if the person maintains direct eye contact, at least in U.S. society. Not doing so can cause others to doubt the words or to feel uncomfortable. In other societies, direct eye contact is not necessarily viewed as positive. In most Asian cultures, eye contact is limited. Incidentally, in all cultures, direct eye contact is generally more difficult when speaking than it is when listening.

**Gestures** are movements of the hands and arms. As an accompaniment to speech, they help to convey meaning and, even with no verbalization, can send a message. Gestures are symbols; their meanings vary across cultures, and the differences are worth learning. For example (Axtell et al., 1997):

- The OK sign (index finger forming a circle with the thumb with the other three fingers extended) is a rude gesture in Germany and Greece.
- The "hook 'em horns" gesture (index and little fingers extended from an upheld fist commonly used at the University of Texas) means in Italy: "Your spouse is having an affair."

- In Italy, if a man twists his index finger into his cheek, it is a compliment meaning, “That woman is beautiful.”

The meanings of gestures can also vary from time to time so you are wise to stay informed especially if you travel to other countries.

As helpful as they can be, gestures can be overdone, as in the case of people who “talk with their hands.” Cultural differences are apparent in this regard, too. For example, Italians are generally quite animated and active in their use of hand movements.

An ordinary gesture can express negativism. Think about how you react to a finger pointed at you to emphasize a statement. Defensive or resentful? These are common reactions even though the “pointer” may just be doing so from habit. Clearly, these behaviors are learned. In your gestures, aim for the “happy medium” between enough movement to add interest and emphasis and too much motion, which detracts. Do avoid potentially annoying gestures.

**Body position.** Another element of body language has to do with how you sit or stand because you create an impression. Expressions of agreement, disagreement, interest, boredom, respect, affection, dominance, and harmony are possible. Degree of self-confidence is often indicated. Positioning yourself at a different eye level than another is not recommended. Try sitting and carrying on a serious conversation with another person who is standing. “I do not like it at all!” is a common comment. Closed positions include crossed arms and legs, the head turned slightly away, and a slouched posture. Open positions are achieved by just the opposite. A relaxed position, as opposed to a rigid, tense one, generally creates a positive atmosphere. The situation will influence body position. Your position when conversing with a friend in a home setting will usually differ from your posture during a job interview. In the classroom, others, including the professor, assess students’ body position. How would you describe yours? In all situations, appearing open and interested is positive.

**Spatial relationships.** Where you position yourself in terms of distance from another reflects spatial relationships. Four distinct zones have been identified (Hall, 1969).

Intimate—actually touching to 18 inches apart

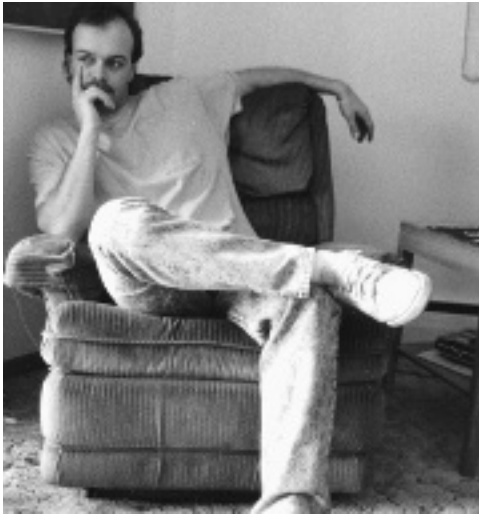
Personal—1½ feet to 4 feet apart

Social—4 feet to 12 feet apart

Public—12 feet or more apart

Individuals vary in their personal-space preferences. Generally, the closer the proximity, the more intimate the relationship. For most people, conversations within the personal zone are comfortable. The social zone is used more in business or other formal interactions. Again, cultural differences are important to note. For example, in most Latin cultures, people stand closer when engaged in interactions.

Often an attitude or emotion is communicated simply by the amount of personal space. Standing close to someone could imply invasion or domination or



**Figure 8-3** What nonverbal message is being communicated?

could signify dependence. Keeping your distance may indicate disinterest, discomfort, or dislike. Being aware of the appropriate physical space distances and placing yourself accordingly are advantageous behaviors (Fig. 8-3).

### Importance and Interpretation of Body Language

Nonverbal behaviors can express emotions, communicate messages, and control human beings; both individual preferences and cultural influences are involved (Schefflen, 1972). Because body language transmits more than half the meaning in most messages, its influence is immense. Body language is also used in what is called presentation of self, the attempt to present ourselves to others so they will see us as we wish to be seen (Goffman, 1959). Think of appearing capable your first

day of work or sociable at a party. How many ways can you communicate these traits through body language? Joshua came to an interview in a nice-looking dark gray suit, white shirt, and a fashionable necktie. From his polished shoes to his neatly combed hair, he looked the part. He smiled confidently, looked directly into the interviewer's eyes, and responded to the outstretched hand with a firm handshake (Fig. 8-4). He was off to an excellent start!

Nonverbal behaviors also indicate aspects of personality. "He is so rude," was the comment. Why? "Because he just stared fixedly at me when I talked to him." One could also be considered rude for not looking directly at a speaker. Aggressive, shy, and confident are just a few of the personality traits that may be assigned to individuals because of their body language. Those skilled in sign language certainly understand the power of body language. The impression you make and the ones you receive, as well as the health of your relationships, are greatly influenced by nonverbal behaviors.

Entire textbooks have been written on the subject of body language. The science of body language is called **kinesics** (Fast, 1970). After learning about body language, one student said, "I never thought about it like that. I have become much more aware of how I may appear to others." If you are in the presence of others now, ask yourself, "What impression am I giving right now with my body language?" Throughout your personal and professional life, this question is a crucial one.



**Figure 8-4** People usually feel comfortable conversing within the personal spatial zone.

How your body language is interpreted will make a marked difference in how you are perceived by others.

Some caution regarding body language is recommended because a few simplistic interpretations have emerged. One seminar leader tried to convince participants that all behaviors carry deep psychological meanings. When he said that stirring an iced drink with the tip of one's finger always has a sexual meaning, I reacted with nonverbal behavior—a shake of my head, which meant “I do not agree!” He seemed to be using imagination in his interpretation. Experts in the field say that most body language is learned and then develops into habits (Schefflen, 1972). Stirring with a finger usually comes from convenience or habit rather than from deep sexual longings.

Videotape can be used to see how you appear to others. As students in a career development class watch themselves during a mock interview, the amazed reactions are predictable: “I did not know I did that,” “I am going to have to sit on my hands,” “I sure looked a lot more confident than I felt.” If you have an opportunity to see yourself as others do, take advantage of a unique learning experience. Even though it may be a jolting experience, it will undoubtedly be well worth it if you make necessary changes. An activity in Reflections and Applications lets you work with both paralanguage and body language.

Are you recognizing that communication is complicated? Its many dimensions can be somewhat overwhelming, yet awareness of all aspects is needed to understand and improve interactions and relationships. Be patient. Positive communication techniques, in the beginning, can be awkward and difficult. Start

## REFLECT AND APPLY

### Reflect

- ◆ *How often do you use forcing words? Grandiose words? Start paying attention to your style of verbalizing and reword when necessary.*
- ◆ *Think of some words that have different meanings for various people.*
- ◆ *Think of a recent conversation. About what percentage of the time were you talking? About what percentage of the time were you listening? If the two percentages aren't about the same (50–50, 60–40, 40–60), evaluate the interaction closely. If you were doing far more talking than listening, change this in future conversations. Or you may want to increase how much you contribute verbally.*
- ◆ *Give a negative example and then a positive example from each of the three areas of body language.*

### Apply

- ◆ *Listen for the three types of closed communication and then inwardly reword them.*
- ◆ *Tune into any words or phrases you use as fillers, and then eliminate them.*
- ◆ *Answer the question under the photo (Fig. 8-3) using an “I” statement.*
- ◆ *Using the following statement, see how many different ways you can change the meaning using paralanguage: “That is really funny.”*

listening to yourself and others and, if necessary, reword, add, subtract, and modify in an attempt to improve. Clear, effective, and open verbalizations, combined with positive uses of paralanguage and body language, are rewarding interpersonal skills. Remember that you learned how to communicate, and you can unlearn and relearn (Reflect and Apply).

## **LOOKING BACK**

- How people communicate is an area not often analyzed and is as important as the information and message that are given.
- Open communication and closed communication are two verbalizing styles; they usually result in quite different reactions and responses.
- People commonly express their ideas and feelings in a closed style using dogmatic, commando, or grandiose expressions instead of being open, flexible, and accurate.
- Open communication consists of “I” statements and tentative words and phrases and qualifiers. Because this style is likely to result in positive relationships, developing the skills is a worthy goal.
- Effective verbal communication is a worthy goal. Being direct, straightforward, clear, timely, supportive, and efficient are beneficial.
- Paralanguage, the variations in voice, adds depth and meaning to expressions.
- Body language, the nonverbal behaviors related to movement, position, and spatial relationships, is of utmost importance in communication.

*Positive communicators lift us by their warmth; their eyes light up in response to us, showing their openness. They refresh our spirit, making us glad to be around them. Negative communicators repel us and arouse feelings of uneasiness within us. We feel lonely, shut out, or attacked around them. Even if they are in our families, we want to avoid negative persons because they zap our energy.*

—Teresa Adams