

Special Report

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BUSINESS SKILLS TO HELP YOU DOUBLE YOUR INCOME AND PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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Section 1

Improving Your Listening Skills

When I was a young child, we sometimes played a game called “Whisper Down the Lane.” Five or six of us would sit in a row, and the first person would make up something and whisper it into the ear of the next person. The story would then be passed down the line in this fashion. The fun came in hearing the story repeated aloud by the last person in line. Invariably, it turned out to be quite different from the original version.

While this is amusing as a children's game, it is not a very amusing situation in real life, especially in business. If you've ever heard your instructions, advice, or presentation repeated to you in distorted form by an employee, coworker, or colleague, you know what I'm talking about.

The success of many of our business activities depends on how well we listen. Studies show that we spend about 80 percent of our waking hours communicating, and at least 45 percent of that time listening.

But although listening is so critical in our daily lives, it is taught and studied far less than the other three basic communications skills: reading, writing, and speaking. Much of the trouble we have communicating with others is because of poor listening skills.

The good news is that listening efficiency can be improved by understanding the steps involved in the listening process and by following these basic guidelines.

Are You a Good Listener?

Most people are not. Many years ago, Sperry (now UniSys) did a survey and found that 85 percent of all people questioned rated themselves average or

less in listening ability. Fewer than 5 percent rated themselves either superior or excellent.

You can come up with a pretty good idea of where you fall in this spectrum by thinking about your relationships with the people in your life: your boss, colleagues, subordinates, best friend, and spouse. If asked, what would they say about how well you listen? Do you often misunderstand assignments, or only vaguely remember what people have said to you? If so, you may need to improve your listening skills. The first step is understanding how the listening process works.

The Four Steps of Listening

Hearing is the first step in the process. At this stage, you simply pay attention to make sure you have heard the message. If your boss says, “McGillicuddy, I need the CAD drawings on my desk by Friday noon,” and you can repeat the sentence, then you have heard her.

The second step is interpretation. Failure to interpret the speaker's words correctly frequently leads to misunderstanding. People sometimes interpret words differently because of varying experience, knowledge, vocabulary, culture, background, and attitudes.

A good speaker uses tone of voice, facial expressions, and mannerisms to help make the message clear to the listener. For instance, if your boss speaks loudly, frowns, and puts her hands on her hips, you know she is probably upset and angry.

During the third step, evaluation, you decide what to do with the information you have received. For example, when listening to a sales pitch, you have two options: you choose either to believe or to disbelieve the salesperson. The judgments you make in the evaluation stage are a crucial part of the listening process.

The final step is to respond to what you have heard. This is a verbal or visual response that lets the speaker know whether you have gotten the message and what your reaction is. When you tell the salesperson that you want to place an order, you are showing that you have heard and believe his message.

Become a Better Listener

When it comes to listening, many of us are guilty of at least some bad habits. For example:

- Instead of listening, do you think about what you're going to say next while the other person is still talking? Engineers, thinking we know the answers and that managers do not, often tune out what non-technical speakers are saying.
- Are you easily distracted by the speaker's mannerisms or by what is going on around you?
- Do you frequently interrupt people before they have finished talking? Engineers, who value facts rather than feelings, often interrupt to set the listener straight, not realizing that the listener has a need to express himself fully, whether he is right or wrong.
- Do you drift off into daydreams because you are sure you know what the speaker is going to say? Engineers have a low tolerance level for people they assume have less knowledge than they do.

All of these habits can hinder our listening ability. Contrary to popular notion, listening is not a passive activity. It requires full concentration and active involvement and is, in fact, hard work.

The following tips can help you become a better listener:

1. *Don't talk. Listen.* Studies show that job applicants are more likely to make a favorable impression and get a job offer when they let the interviewer do

most of the talking. This demonstrates that people appreciate a good listener more than they do a good talker.

Why is this so? Because people want a chance to get their own ideas and opinions across. A good listener lets them do it. If you interrupt the speaker or put limitations on your listening time, the speaker will get the impression that you're not interested in what he is saying – even if you are. So be courteous and give the speaker your full attention.

This technique can help you win friends, supporters, and sales. Says top salesman Frank Bettger, “I no longer worry about being a brilliant conversationalist. I simply try to be a good listener. I notice that people who do that are usually welcome wherever they go.”

2. *Don't jump to conclusions.* Many people tune out a speaker when they think they have the gist of his conversation or know what he's trying to say next. Assumptions can be dangerous. Maybe the speaker is not following the same train of thought that you are, or is not planning to make the point you think he is. If you don't listen, you may miss the real point the speaker is trying to get across.

3. *Listen “between the lines.”* Concentrate on what is not being said as well as what is being said. Remember, a lot of clues to meaning come from the speaker's tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures. People don't always say what they mean, but their body language is usually an accurate indication of their attitude and emotional state.

4. *Ask questions.* If you are not sure of what the speaker is saying, ask. It's perfectly acceptable to say, “Do you mean . . . ?” or “Did I understand you to say . . . ?” It's also a good idea to repeat what the speaker has said in your own words to confirm that you have understood him correctly.

Sometimes we engineers cling to the mistaken notion that if it's technical, we are expected to know it. But with the explosion of technology and information,

that's impossible. As Thomas Edison said, "We don't know one millionth of one percent about anything." The only way you learn is by listening and asking questions.

5. *Don't let yourself be distracted by the environment or by the speaker's appearance, accent, mannerisms, or word use.* It's sometimes difficult to overlook a strong accent, a twitch, sexist language, a fly buzzing around the speaker's head, and similar distractions. But paying too much attention to these distributions can break your concentration and make you miss the point of the conversation.

If outside commotion is a problem, try to position yourself away from it. Make eye contact with the speaker, and force yourself to focus on the message, not the environment.

Keep an open mind. Don't just listen for statements that back up your own opinions and support your beliefs, or for certain parts that interest you. The point of listening, after all, is to gain new information.

Be willing to listen to someone else's point of view and ideas. A subject that may seem boring or trivial at first can turn out to be fascinating, if you listen with an open mind.

Take advantage of your brain power. On the average, you can think four times faster than the listener can talk. So, when listening, use this extra brainpower to evaluate what has been said and summarize the central ideas in your own mind.

That way, you'll be better prepared to answer any questions or criticisms the speaker poses, and you'll be able to discuss the topic much more effectively.

6. *Provide feedback.* Make eye contact with the speaker. Show him you understand his talk by nodding your head, maintaining an upright posture, and, if appropriate, interjecting an occasional comment such as "I see" or "that's

interesting” or “really.” The speaker will appreciate your interest and feel that you are really listening.

Motivation is an essential key to becoming a good listener. Think how your ears perk up if someone says, “Let me tell you how pleased I am with that report you did,” or “I’m going to reorganize the department, and you are in line for a promotion. “

To get the most out of a meeting, speech, or conversation, go in with a positive attitude. Say to yourself, “What can I learn from this to make me more valuable in my industry and to my company?” You might be surprised at what you can learn, even from routine meetings and bull sessions at the water fountain.

Section 2

Improving Your Interpersonal Skills

We all know people with great “people skills,” and sometimes wonder, “How do they do it?”

It’s simply a matter of knowing the basics of how to deal with other people, and then making a conscious effort to put those basics into practice. Here are seven habits of people whom others view as having great interpersonal skills.

- 1. They present their best selves to the public.** Your moods change, but your customer – external or internal – doesn’t care. Make a conscious effort to be your most positive, enthusiastic, helpful self, especially when that’s not how you feel. If you need to vent, do it in private.
- 2. They answer phone calls promptly.** Few things annoy people more than not having their phone calls returned. Get back to people within 2 hours. If you can’t, have your voice mail guide them to others who can help in your

place. If you're really uncomfortable with someone and don't want to talk with them on the phone, answer their query through a fax or e-mail. Or, call when you know they won't be there and leave the information on their voice mail.

3. They call people by their names and ask questions about their lives.

Take the time to learn and use everyone's name, especially secretaries. Most people don't. You don't have to glad-hand, but if you see a child's picture on someone's desk, they'd probably appreciate your asking, "How old is your daughter?" Establishing some common bond makes the other person more receptive to working with you.

4. They meet people halfway. Sometimes we're right and the other person is wrong, but many techies I observe seem to enjoy going out of their way to rub it in the other person's face. Implement the correct technical solution without making the other person feel stupid or ignorant, e.g., "That's a good idea, but given the process variables, here's another approach that would avoid contamination problems downstream...."

5. They listen carefully before speaking. A sure sign you are not listening to the other person is that you can't wait to say what you want to say, and as soon as the other person pauses, you jump in and start talking. Even if you think you know the answer, listen to the other person. Their knowledge and grasp of the situation may surprise you. If not, listening shows you considered their opinion and didn't just steamroll over them.

6. They keep eye contact. When you're talking with someone, look them in the eye at points in the conversation. If you're explaining something while typing on a keyboard, take your eyes away from the screen now and then to look and talk directly at the other person. After all, it's a PC, not a car; you won't crash if you take your eyes off the road.

7. **They are not afraid to admit when they are wrong.** Techies are afraid that nontechies will think they are incompetent if they admit to being wrong. The opposite is true. Andrew Lanyi, a stock market expert, explains, “The more you are willing to admit that you are not a guru, the more credibility you gain.” No one knows everything, and everybody knows people make mistakes. If you refuse to admit mistakes or pretend to know everything, people won’t trust you when you *are* right and *do* know the answer.

IMPROVING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

Poor communication is another barrier to working effectively with others. For techies, communicating with nontechies is particularly problematic and frustrating.

But it doesn’t have to be. Realize you know the technology and jargon – and they may not. Why should their lack of technical knowledge annoy you? Again, if they knew every technical detail, you might not have a job.

Here are steps you can take to get your message across so everyone understands, and neither you nor they are frustrated by the communication process:

1. Listen and make sure you understand. Listening is a skill that requires your full attention. Don’t have a conversation while you’re checking your e-mail or searching Web sites. Do one thing at a time and you will do each thing well.

2. Prove you understand – feed it back to them. When the other person asks a question or makes a statement, repeat it back to them in your own words, and ask whether that’s what they meant. Often what they said – or what you heard – is not exactly what they were trying to get across ... and the two of you need to try again.

3. Never underestimate the (technical) intelligence of the average user. Nontechies lack technical background, data, and aptitude – not I.Q. Explain

technical concepts in plain, simple language. Avoid jargon, or at least define technical terms before using them. A “T1 circuit” may confuse your boss, but everyone understands the concept of a “telephone line.”

4. Talk to users at their level, not yours. In addition to keeping things simple, focus on what’s important to the other person, which is not necessarily what is important to you. For example, a graphic designer I know goes into elaborate explanations of kerning and fonts when all I want to know is whether to make the headline bigger.

5. Make sure they get it. Nontechies often don’t ask questions for fear of being perceived as stupid. Encourage the listener to stop you and ask questions if they don’t understand. Ask them questions so you know whether they got it. If not, find out what they don’t understand. Then make it clear to them.

6. Don’t assume. The old joke goes, “When you assume, you make an *a-* of *u* and *me*. If you want someone to run a simulation on Windows 95, for example, make sure they have Windows 95 installed on their PC and know how to use it.

7. Don’t let your annoyance and impatience show. Sure, it can be frustrating explaining technical topics to people who don’t have the background. But if you act annoyed, lose your patience, or become arrogant, your listener will be turned off – and you’ll make an enemy instead of an ally.

8. Budget communications time into the schedule. Part of the frustration techies feel explaining technical topics to nontechies is the time it takes, which they could be spending on their “real” work. The solution is to accept that communication is a mandatory requirement on every project, and budget communications time into your schedule accordingly.

9. Use the 80/20 rule. The most effective communicators spend 80% of their time listening and only 20% talking. Many of us like to lecture, pontificate, or

explain details of no interest to the other person. Instead, let the other person tell you what they need and want, then give it to them.

10. Make a friend. If there is chemistry or camaraderie between you and the other person, let it flow and grow naturally. You shouldn't force a connection where there is none, and you don't have to be a social butterfly when you're not. But as a rule, people prefer to deal with people they like. So make it easy for the other person to like you. Or at least don't give them reasons to dislike you.

ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- **Prefer positive to negative statements.** Instead of "George didn't finish coding the system," say "George got 95% of the coding done." Instead of saying something is bad, say it's good *but could be made even better*. Instead of saying someone "failed" to do something, just say he didn't do it.
- **Don't speak when you're angry.** Cool off. Don't feel you have to answer a criticism or complaint on the spot. Instead, say "Let me give it some thought and get back to you ... is tomorrow morning good?" This prevents you from saying things you'll regret later or making snap decisions.
- **Don't use value judgments to make colleagues feel bad about past mistakes.** Avoid the implication that errors in judgment, which are temporary and one-time, are due to character and intelligence flaws. Don't say "that was stupid"; instead say "We can't ever let that happen again." Focus on preventing future repetitions of the mistake rather than assigning blame.
- **Be courteous, but don't overdo humility.** Be pleasant and personable, but not fawning. Treat other people with respect, and in return, insist

they do the same with you. If a person is clearly technology phobic, don't falsely flatter them with malarkey about how quickly they're catching on ... unless they really are.

- **Empathize before stating an opinion.** Don't seek out argument; argue only when necessary. And make the conversation collaborative rather than adversarial. Say "I understand" when the other person gives his or her opinion. "I understand" doesn't mean you agree; it means you heard what they said and considered it in forming your own opinion, which you're now going to present.
- **Apologize completely.** Apologies should be unconditional – "I was wrong," not "I know I did X but that's because you did Y." Don't try to bring third parties or external factors into the equation. The bottom line is: It was your responsibility. Admit your mistakes and move on.

TO SUM IT ALL UP....

The good news is, even though you may indeed be a rocket scientist, developing your interpersonal skills isn't rocket science. It's easy. Follow these tips and your customers, colleagues, and management will say of you: "Not only technically sharp, but really easy to work with." No compliment can ensure your success better.

Section 3

10 Ways to Get More Done in Less Time

The ability to work faster and get more done in less time isn't slavery; it's freedom. You're going to have the same big pile of stuff to do every day whether you want it or not. If you can be more efficient, you can get it done and still have

some time left over for yourself – whether it's to read the paper, hike, jog, or play the piano.

Here are 10 ideas that can increase your personal productivity so you can get more done in less time:

1. *Master your PC.* Every engineer or manager who wants to be more productive should use a modern PC with the latest software. Doing so can double, triple, or even quadruple your output.

Install on your PC the same software as your colleagues, other departments within your organization, vendors, and business partners use. The broader the range of your software, the more easily you can open and read files from other sources.

Constantly upgrade your desktop to eliminate too-slow computer processes that waste your time, such as slow downloading of files or Web pages. If you use the Internet a lot, get the fastest access you can. DSL is getting cheaper by the month and is well worth the money at its current price levels.

2. *Don't be a perfectionist.* "I'm a non-perfectionist," said Isaac Asimov, author of 475 books. "I don't look back in regret or worry at what I have written." Be a careful worker, but don't agonize over your work beyond the point where the extra effort no longer produces a proportionately worthwhile improvement in your final product.

Be excellent but not perfect. Customers do not have the time or budget for perfection; for most projects, getting 95 to 98 percent of the way to perfection is good enough. That doesn't mean you deliberately make errors or give less than your best. It means you stop polishing and fiddling with the job when it looks good to you – and you don't agonize over the fact you're not spending another hundred hours on it. Create it, check it, and then let it go.

Understand the exponential curve of excellence. Quality improves with effort according to an exponential curve. That means early effort yields the biggest results; subsequent efforts yield smaller and smaller improvements, until eventually the miniscule return is not worth the effort. Productive people stop at the point where the investment in further effort on a task is no longer justified by the tiny incremental improvement it would produce. Aim for 100 percent perfection, and you are unlikely to be productive or profitable. Consistently hit within the 90 to 98 percent range, and you will maximize both customer satisfaction as well as return on your time investment.

“Perfection does not exist,” wrote Alfred De Musset. “To understand this is the triumph of human intelligence; to expect to possess it is the most dangerous kind of madness.”

3. *Free yourself from the pressure to be an innovator.* As publisher Cameron Foote observes, “Clients are looking for good, not great.” Do the best you can to meet the client’s or your boss’s requirements. They will be happy. Do not feel pressured to reinvent the wheel or create a masterpiece on every project you take on. Don’t be held up by the false notion that you must uncover some great truth or present your boss with revolutionary ideas and concepts. Most successful business solutions are just common sense packaged to meet a specific need.

Eliminate performance pressure. Don’t worry about whether what you are doing is different or better than what others have done before you. Just do the best you can. That will be enough.

4. *Switch back and forth between different tasks.* Even if you consider yourself a specialist, do projects outside your specialty. Inject variety into your project schedule. Arrange your daily schedule so you switch off from one assignment to another at least once or twice each day. Variety, as the saying goes, is indeed the spice of life.

Approximately 70 to 90 percent of what I am doing at any time is in familiar tasks within my area of expertise. This keeps me highly productive. The other 10 to 30 percent is in new areas, markets, industries, or disciplines outside my area of expertise. This keeps me fresh and allows me to explore things that captivate my imagination but are not in my usual schedule of assignments.

5. *Don't waste time working on projects you don't have yet.* Get letters of agreement, contracts, purchase orders, and budget sign-offs before proceeding. Don't waste time starting the work for projects that may not come to fruition. An official approval or go-ahead from your boss or customer makes the project real and firm, so you can proceed at full speed, with the confidence and enthusiasm that come from knowing you have been given the green light.

6. *Make deadlines firm but adequate.* Of 150 executives surveyed by AccounTemps, 37% rated the dependable meeting of deadlines as the most important quality of a team player (cited in *Continental* magazine, October 1997, page 44).

Productive people set and meet deadlines. Without a deadline, the motivation to do a task is small to nonexistent. Tasks without assigned deadlines automatically go to the bottom of your priority list. After all, if you have two reports to file – and one is due a week from Thursday, and the other due “whenever you can get around to it” – which do you suppose will get written first?

Often you will collaborate with your supervisor or customer in determining deadlines. Set deadlines for a specific date and time, not a time period. For example, “due June 23 by 3 pm or sooner,” not “in about two weeks.” Having a specific date and time for completion eliminates confusion and gives you motivation to get the work done on time.

At the same time, don't make deadlines too tight. Try to build in a few extra days for the unexpected, such as a missing piece of information, a delay from a subcontractor, a last-minute change, or a crisis on another project.

7. *Protect and value your time.* Productive people guard their time more heavily than the gold in Fort Knox. They don't waste time. They get right to the point. They may come off as abrupt or dismissive to some people. But they realize they cannot give everyone who contacts them all the time each person wants. They choose who they spend time on and with. They make decisions. They say what needs to be said, do what needs to be done – and then move on.

Assign a dollar value to your time. If you work 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, that comes to 2,000 hours a year. To calculate your hourly rate, divide your salary by 2,000. Example: \$75,000 annual salary divided by 2,000 hours comes to \$37.50 an hour.

A productive person can tell you in an instant the worth of his or her time, because he's already done this calculation and committed the answer to memory. Productive people weigh the effort required for specific activities – and the return it will produce – against the cost of the time based on the dollar value of their hour.

For instance, if my time is worth \$37.50, and I spend an hour driving to a discount store to save \$10 on supplies, I have not used my time wisely – I am \$27.50 in the hole. On the other hand, if I saved \$1,000 on a new computer for the same trip, it obviously was worth the time.

8. *Stay focused.* As Robert Ringer observed in his best-selling book *Looking Out for Number One*, successful people apply themselves to the task at hand. They work until the work gets done. They concentrate on one or two things at a time. They don't go in a hundred different directions. My experience is that people who are big talkers – constantly spouting ideas or proposing deals and ventures – are

spread out in too many different directions to be effective. Efficient people have a vision and focus their activities to achieve that vision.

9. *Set a production goal.* Stephen King writes 1,500 words every day except his birthday, Christmas, and the Fourth of July. Steinway makes 800 pianos in its German plant every year.

Workers and organizations that want to meet deadlines and be successful set a production goal and make it. An individual who truly wants to be productive sets a production goal, meets it, and then *keeps going* until he or she can do no more – or runs out of time – for the day.

Joe Lansdale, author of *Bad Chili* and many other novels, says he never misses his productivity goal of writing three pages a day, five days a week. “I’m not in the mood, I don’t feel like it, what kind of an excuse is that?” Lansdale said in an interview with *Publisher’s Weekly* (September 29, 1997). “If I’m not in the mood, do I not go to the chicken plant if I’ve got a job in the chicken plant?”

10. *Do work you enjoy.* In advising people on choosing their life’s work, David Ogilvy, founder of the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather, quotes a Scottish proverb that says, “Be happy while you’re living; for you’re a long time dead.” The Tao Te Ching says, “In work, do what you enjoy.”

When you enjoy your work, it really isn’t work. To me, success is being able to make a good living while spending the workday in pleasurable tasks. You won’t love every project equally, of course. But try to balance “must-do” mandatory tasks with things that are more fun for you. Seek assignments that are exciting, interesting, and fulfilling.

Can you train yourself to like work better and enjoy it more? Motivational experts say we do have the ability to change our attitudes and behavior. “Attitude is a trap or it is freedom. Create your own,” writes Judy Crookes in *Inner Realm* magazine.

“Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans,” advised Max Ehrmann in his 1927 essay “Desiderata.” “Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.”

Section 4

How to Give a Successful Presentation

Dr. Rob Gilbert is one of the country's top motivational speakers and a master of teaching presentation skills to others. (He is also a master of direct marketing, through which he sells his books, audiotapes, and public workshops.)

At the beginning of a recent Gilbert workshop I attended on “How to Give a Speech,” Dr. Gilbert told his audience: “If you get one good idea from this session, it will have been worth the price.” In fact, I got at least 42 good ideas on improving presentation skills, and Dr. Gilbert has generously given permission for me to share them with you.

How To Give A Speech

1. Write your own introduction and mail it to the sponsoring organization in advance of your appearance.
2. Establish rapport with the audience early.
3. What you say is not as important as how you say it.
4. Self-effacing humor works best.
5. Ask the audience questions.
6. Don't give a talk – have a conversation.
7. Thirty percent of the people in the audience will never ask the speaker a question.

8. A little bit of nervous tension is probably good for you.
9. Extremely nervous? Use rapport building, not stress reduction, techniques.
10. The presentation does not have to be great. Tell your audience that if they get one good idea out of your talk, it will have been worthwhile for them.
11. People want stories, not information.
12. Get the audience involved.
13. People pay more for entertainment than education. (Proof: The average college professor would have to work 10 centuries to earn what Oprah Winfrey makes in a year.)
14. You have to love what you are doing. (Dr. Gilbert has 8,000 cassette tapes of speeches and listens to these tapes three to four hours a day.)
15. The first time you give a particular talk it will not be great.
16. The three hardest audiences to address: engineers, accountants, and high school students.
17. If heckled, you can turn any situation around ("verbal aikido").
18. Communicate from the Heart + Have an Important Message = Speaking Success.
19. You can't please everybody, so don't even try. Some will like you and your presentation and some won't.
20. Ask your audience how you are doing and what they need to hear from you to rate you higher.
21. Be flexible. Play off your audience.
22. Be totally authentic.
23. To announce a break say: "We'll take a five minute break now, so I'll expect you back here in 10 minutes." It always gets a laugh.
24. To get them back in the room (if you are the speaker), go out into the hall and shout, "He's starting; he's starting!"

25. Courage is to feel the fear and do it anyway. The only way to overcome what you fear is to do it.
26. If panic strikes: Just give the talk and keep your mouth moving. The fear will subside in a minute or two.
27. In speaking, writing, teaching and marketing, everything you see, read, hear, do or experience is grist for the mill.
28. Tell touching stories.
29. If the stories are about you, be the goat, not the hero. People like speakers who are humble; audiences hate bragging and braggarts.
30. Join Toastmasters. Take a Dale Carnegie course in public speaking. Join the National Speakers Association.
31. Go hear the great speakers and learn from them.
32. If you borrow stories or techniques from other speakers, adapt this material and use it in your own unique way.
33. Use audiovisual aids if you wish, but not as a crutch.
34. When presenting a daylong workshop, make the afternoon shorter than the morning.
35. Asking people to perform a simple physical exercise (stretching, Simon Says, etc.) as an activity during a break can increase their energy level and overcome lethargy.
36. People love storytellers.
37. Today's most popular speaking topic: Change (in business, society, lifestyles, etc.) and how to cope with it.
38. There is no failure – just feedback.
39. At the conclusion of your talk, tell your audience that they were a great audience even if they were not.

40. Ask for applause using this closing: "You've been a wonderful audience. [pause]. Thank you very much."
41. If you want to become a good speaker give as many talks as you can to as many groups as you can, even if you don't get paid at first. You will improve as you gain experience. (Dr. Gilbert has some speeches he has given more than 1,000 times.)
42. Cruise lines frequently offer speakers free trips in exchange for a brief lecture during the cruise. And they do not demand top, experienced speakers.

Section 5

The Case Against PowerPoint

It's an insidious trend: Conference sponsors and meeting planners insisting that speakers create their presentations using a specific software product, namely PowerPoint.

Why is mandating use of PowerPoint by your speakers bad? For several reasons.

First, dictating format and software takes the focus away from where it should be – the content, message, and audience – and puts it on the technology. It's like telling a writer, "I don't care how good the piece is as long as it's in Word 7."

Second, it encourages a conformity that can rob speakers and presentations of their individuality. Tell me you haven't thought more than once that all PowerPoint presentations look alike after awhile.

Third, it's boring. So many bad presentations have been prepared with PowerPoint, I believe the very use of the medium itself can be a signal to some audience members that says, "Prepared to be bored."

Fourth, it renders many speakers ineffective or at least less effective. When the speaker is focusing on his clicker, keyboard, or computer screen, he is not focusing on – or interacting with – his audience, a key requisite for a successful talk.

Fifth, it locks the speaker into the prepared slides, reducing spontaneity, ad libbing, and the valuable ability to adjust the presentation in response to audience reaction and interest – another requisite for a successful talk.

Sixth, it can literally put the audience to sleep. What's the first step in preparing an audience to view a PowerPoint presentation? To dim the lights – an action proven to induce drowsiness in humans.

What should be done? As a meeting planner, you get your best results from speakers when you create a speaking environment in which they can give you their best performance.

Here are my suggestions for creating such an environment in the computer age:

1. *Don't require PowerPoint.* If the speaker wants to use PowerPoint, fine. If he doesn't, also fine. Never force a speaker to use a format or medium he doesn't like or is uncomfortable with. It will compromise his performance and effectiveness significantly.
2. *Don't require visuals at all.* Does this surprise you? The fact is, many subjects – telephone skills, for instance – do not lend themselves to charts, graphics, tables, and other PowerPoint-type visuals. If you force every speaker to use visuals – even those whose subjects don't require it – you'll get that dreaded beast: A PowerPoint presentation created

just because someone said the presenter had to have one. You know the type: Full of word slides and lists of bullets that contribute nothing to clarity.

3. *Check out your speakers in advance.* See them live or watch their videos. Talk to clients who have hired them. Convince yourself that they're pros. Then leave them alone and let them do their job. Don't hire a trained surgeon, then tell him what surgical instrument to use on your brain during the operation.
4. *Avoid the uniformity trap.* PowerPoint presentations suffer from sameness, which is the first cousin of dullness. Audiences crave freshness and difference.
5. *Avoid the handout trap.* A key advantage of PowerPoint is the ability to easily turn slides into hard-copy handouts. The trouble is, most of these slide printouts, removed from the speech itself, are cryptic when viewed in isolation if not totally meaningless. If the world could communicate effectively with just diagrams and bullets, sentences would never have been invented.

Okay. Let's say you are putting together a presentation and PowerPoint is required. What can you do to make it more effective? I have four ideas for you.

* First, don't have the projector on all the time. Use PowerPoint selectively, not throughout the entire presentation.

When there's a valuable picture to show, show it. When you're through with it, turn off the projector and turn the lights back on. The brightness rouses the audience out of their darkness-induced stupor. In a darkened room, it's too easy to close your eyes and nod off a bit.

* Second, use visuals only when they communicate more effectively than words. If you are talking about quality, having the word "Quality" on screen

adds little to your point. On the other hand, if you want to explain what an aardvark looks like, there are no words that can do it as effectively as simply showing a picture.

* Third, consider adding other media as supplements or even alternatives to PowerPoint. When I taught telephone selling, the sound of a ringing telephone and a prop – a toy telephone – engaged the trainees in a way computer slides could not.

* Fourth, design your presentation so that, if there is a problem with the computer equipment, you can go on without it. There's nothing more embarrassing than to see a speaker fall apart because he can't find the right slide. Use visuals as an enhancement, not a crutch.

Am I a dinosaur or a curmudgeon, to rail against PowerPoint in this manner? Perhaps. I don't own a laptop computer, wireless phone, pager, Palm Pilot, or PDA.

But one thing I have learned in 20 years of teaching and giving presentations: The best presenters have conversations with their audiences. If you believe you need to have a computer running to have an effective conversation, maybe that's a premise you want to rethink.

Section 6

Practical Techniques for Producing Profitable Ideas

Here is what you should do: Identify the problem, assemble pertinent facts, gather general knowledge, look for combinations, sleep on it, use a checklist, get feedback, team up, and give new ideas a chance.

Identify the problem

The first step in solving a problem is to know what the problem is. But many of us forge ahead without knowing what it is we are trying to accomplish. Moral: Don't apply a solution before you have taken the time to accurately define the problem.

Assemble pertinent facts

In crime stories, detectives spend most of their time looking for clues. They cannot solve a case with clever thinking alone; they must have the facts. You, too, must have the facts before you can solve a problem or make an informed decision.

Professionals in every field know the importance of gathering specific facts. A scientist planning an experiment checks the abstracts to see what similar experiments have been performed. An author writing a book collects everything he can on the subject, newspaper clippings, photos, official records, transcripts of inter-views, diaries, magazine articles, and so on. A consultant may spend weeks or months digging around a company before coming up with a solution to a major problem.

Keep an organized file of the background material you collect on a project. Review the file before you begin to formulate your solution. If you are a competent typist, use a typewriter or word processor to rewrite your research notes and materials. This step increases your familiarity with the background information and can give you a fresh perspective on the problem. Also, when you type notes you condense a mound of material into a few neat pages that show all the facts at a glance.

Gather general knowledge

In engineering, specific facts have to do with the project at hand. They include the budget, the schedule, the resources available, the customer's specifications, plus knowledge of the products, components, and techniques to be

used in completing the project. General knowledge has to do with the expertise you've developed in engineering and business, and includes your storehouse of information concerning life, events, people, science, technology, management, and the world at large.

In most plants, it is the gray haired foreman, the 20-year veteran, that the young engineers turn to when they have problems. This senior worker is able to solve so many problems so quickly not because he is brighter or better educated than others, but because in his 20 years of plant work he has seen those problems – or similar ones before.

You can't match the senior man's experience. But you can accelerate your own education by becoming a student in the many areas that relate to your job. Trade journals are the most valuable source of general engineering knowledge. Subscribe to the journals that relate to your field. Scan them all, and clip and save articles that contain information that may be useful to you. Organize your clipping files for easy access to articles by subject.

Read books in your field and start a reference library. Think back to that 20 year plant foreman; if he writes a book on how to troubleshoot problems in a chemical plant, and you buy the book, you can learn in a day or so of reading what it took him 20 years to accumulate. Take some night school courses. Attend seminars, conferences, trade shows. Make friends with people in your field and exchange information, stories, ideas, case histories, technical tips.

Most of the successful professionals I know are compulsive information – collectors. You should be, too.

Look for combinations

Someone once complained to me “There's nothing new in the world. It's all been done before.” Maybe. But an idea doesn't have to be something completely new. Many ideas are simply a new combination of existing elements. By looking

for combinations, for new relationships between old ideas, you can come up with a fresh approach.

The clock-radio, for example, was invented by someone who combined two existing technologies the clock and the radio. Niels Bohr combined two separate ideas – Rutherford's model of the atom as a nucleus orbited by electrons and Planck's quantum theory to create the modern conception of the atom.

Look for synergistic combinations when you examine the facts. What two things can work together to form a third thing that is a new idea. In your chemical engineering work, if you have two devices, and each performs a function you need, can you link them together to create a new invention?

Sleep on it

Putting the problem aside for a time can help you renew your idea producing powers just when you think your creative well has run dry.

But don't resort to this method after only five minutes of puzzled thought. First, you have to gather all the information you can. Next, you need to go over the information again and again as you try to come up with that one big idea. You'll come to a point where you get bleary, punch drunk, just hashing the same ideas over and over. This is the time to take a break, to put the problem aside, to sleep on it and let your unconscious mind take over.

A solution may strike you as you sleep, shower, shave or walk in the park. Even if not, when you return to the problem, you will find you can attack it with renewed vigor and a fresh perspective. I use this technique in writing; I put aside what I have written and read it fresh the next day. Many times the things that I thought were brilliant when I wrote them can be much improved at second glance.

Use a checklist

Checklists can be used to stimulate creative thinking and as a starting point for new ideas. Many manufacturers, consultants, technical magazines, and trade

associations publish checklists you can use in your own work. But the best checklists are those you create yourself, because they are tailored to the problems that come up in your daily routine.

For example, Jill is a technical salesperson well versed in the technical features of her product, but she has trouble when it comes to closing a sale. She could overcome this weakness by making a checklist of typical customer objections and how to answer them. (The list of objections can be culled from sales calls made over the course of several weeks. Possible tactics for overcoming these objections can be garnered from fellow salespeople, from books on selling, and from her own trial and error efforts.) Then, when faced with a tough customer, she doesn't have to "reinvent the wheel," but will be prepared for all the standard objections because of her familiarity with the checklist.

However, no checklist can contain an idea for every situation that comes up. Remember, a checklist should be used as a tool for creative thinking, not as a crutch.

Get feedback

Sherlock Holmes was a brilliant detective. But even he needed to bounce ideas off Dr. Watson at times. As a professional writer, I think I know how to write an engaging piece of copy. But when I show a draft to my wife, she can always spot at least half a dozen ways to make it better.

Some engineers, designers, researchers and business-people prefer to work alone. I'm one of them, and maybe you are, too. But if you don't work as part of a team, getting someone else's opinion of your work can help you focus your thinking and produce ideas you hadn't thought of.

Take the feedback for what it's worth. If you feel you are right, and the criticisms are off base, ignore them. But more often than not, feedback will provide useful information that can help you come up with the best, most profitable ideas.

Of course, if you ask others to “take a look at this report,” you should be willing to do the same for them when they solicit your opinion. You'll find that reviewing the work of others is fun; it's easier to critique someone else's work than create your own. And you'll be gratified by the improvements you think of that are obvious to you but would never have occurred to the other person.

Team up

Some people think more creatively when working in groups. But how large should the group be? My opinion is that two is the ideal team. Any more and you're in danger of ending up with a committee that spins its wheels and accomplishes nothing. The person you team up with should have skills and thought processes that balance and complement your own. For example, in advertising, copywriters (the word people) team up with art directors (the picture people).

In entrepreneurial firms, the idea person who started the company will often hire a professional manager from one of the Fortune 500 companies as the new venture grows; the entrepreneur knows how to make things happen, but the manager knows how to run a profitable, efficient corporation.

As an engineer, you may invent a better microchip. But if you want to make a fortune selling it, you should team up with someone who has a strong sales and marketing background.

Give new ideas a chance

Many business people, especially managerial types, develop their critical faculties more finely than their creative faculties. If creative engineers and inventors had listened to these people, we would not have personal computers, cars, airplanes, light bulbs or electricity.

The creative process works in two stages. The first is the creative stage, when ideas flow freely. The second is the critical or “editing” stage, where you hold each thought up to the cold light of day and see if it is practical.

Many of us make the mistake of mixing the stages together. During the creative stage, we are too eager to criticize concepts as soon as it is presented. As a result, we shoot down suggestions and make snap judgments when we should be encouraging the production of ideas. And many good ideas are killed this way.

Section 7

8 Ways to Improve Your Managerial Skills

Each year, thousands of people make the switch from staff engineer or scientist to manager.

And, although many of us look forward to the change, we find it frustrating once we get there.

When we were engineers, we were rewarded for our technical skills and labors in direct proportion to what we accomplished.

But now, as a manager, our success is measured not by our own output but by the output and productivity of the people we supervise. And that sense of not being in direct control can be a frustrating feeling.

Fortunately, working with others and getting them to give you their best can be just as rewarding as technical accomplishments . . . once you get the hang of it. Here are eight tips that will help you to manage and to guide your people more effectively.

The Human Touch

The most valuable qualities you can develop within yourself are patience, kindness, and consideration for other people. Although machines and chemicals don't care whether you scream and curse at them, people do.

Your subordinates are not just engineers, scientists, administrators, clerks, and programmers – they're people, first and foremost. People with families and friends, likes and dislikes. People with feelings. Respect them as people and you'll get their respect and loyalty in return. But treat them coldly and impersonally and they will lose motivation to perform for you.

Corny as it sounds, the Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" is a sound, proven management principle. The next time you're about to discipline a worker or voice your displeasure, ask yourself, "Would I like to be spoken to the way I'm thinking of speaking to him or her?" Give your people the same kindness and consideration that you would want to receive if you were in their place.

Don't Be Overly Critical

As a manager, it's part of your job to keep your people on the right track. And that involves pointing out errors and telling them where they've gone wrong.

But some managers are overly critical. They're not happy unless they are criticizing. They rarely accomplish much or take on anything new themselves, but they are only too happy to tell others where they went wrong, why they're doing it incorrectly, and why they could do the job better.

Don't be this type of person. Chances are, you have more knowledge and experience in your field than a good many of the people you supervise. But that's why the company made you the boss! Your job is to guide and teach these people, not to yell or nit-pick or show them how dumb they are compared to you.

Mary Kay Ash, founder and director of Mary Kay Cosmetics, says that successful managers encourage their people instead of criticizing them. "Forget their mistakes," she advises, "and zero in on one small thing they do right. Praise them and they'll do more things right and discover talents and abilities they never realized they had."

Let Them Fail

Of course, to follow through on Mary Kay's advice, you've got to let your people make some mistakes.

Does this shock you? I'm not surprised. Most workers expect to be punished for every mistake. Most managers think it's a "black eye" on their record when an employee goofs.

But successful managers know that the best way for their people to learn and grow is through experience and that means taking chances and making errors.

Give your people the chance to try new skills or tasks without a supervisor looking over their shoulders but only on smaller, less crucial projects. That way, mistakes won't hurt the company and can quickly and easily be corrected. On major projects, where performance is critical, you'll want to give as much supervision as is needed to ensure successful completion of the task.

Be Available

Have you ever been enthusiastic about a project, only to find yourself stuck, unable to continue, while you waited for someone higher up to check your work before giving the go ahead for the next phase?

Few things dampen employee motivation more than management inattention. As a manager, you have a million things to worry about besides the report sitting in your mailbox, waiting for your approval. But to the person who wrote that report, each day's delay causes frustration, anger, worry, and insecurity.

So, although you've got a lot to do, give your first attention to approving, reviewing, and okaying projects in progress. If employees stop by to ask a question or discuss a project, invite them to sit down for a few minutes. If you're pressed for time, set up an appointment for later that day, and keep it. This will let your people know you are genuinely interested in them. And that's something they'll really appreciate.

Improve the Workplace

People are most productive when they have the right tools and work in pleasant, comfortable surroundings. According to a study by the Buffalo Organization, a comfortable office environment creates an extra \$1600 of productivity annually for professionals and managers.

Having the right equipment is equally important. One of my clients recently hired a full-time technical writer at a salary of \$25,000, but was reluctant to invest \$2500 in a word processor for him to use.

I explained that, in my experience, word processors can easily double the productivity of a writer. Therefore, if the writer was expected to produce \$25,000 worth of work with a typewriter, he could produce \$50,000 with a word processor – an extra \$25,000 a year in productivity for a \$2500 investment! The client bought the computer. Both the company and the writer were delighted with the results.

Be aware that you may not be the best judge of what your employees need to do their jobs effectively. Even if you've done the job yourself, someone else may work best with a different set of tools, or in a different setup because each person is different.

If your people complain about work conditions, listen. These complaints are usually not made for self gain, but stem from each worker's desire to do the best job possible. And by providing the right equipment or work space, you can achieve enormous increases in output ... often with a minimal investment.

A Personal Interest in People

When is the last time you asked your secretary how her son was doing in Little League or how she enjoyed her vacation?

Good salespeople know that relating to the customer on a person-to-person level is the fastest way to win friends and sales. Yet many technical managers remain aloof and avoid conversation that does not relate directly to business. Why? Perhaps it's because engineers are more comfortable with equations and inanimate objects than with people, and feel uncomfortable in social situations.

But just as a salesperson wants to get to know his customer, you can benefit by showing a little personal interest in your people – their problems, family life, health, and hobbies. This doesn't have to be insincere or overdone, just the type of routine conversation that should naturally pass between people who work closely.

If you've been ignoring your employees, get into the habit of taking a few minutes every week (or every day) to say “hello” and chat for a minute or two. If an employee has a personal problem affecting his mood or performance, try to find out what it is and how you might help. Send a card or small gift on important occasions and holidays, such as a 10th anniversary with the firm or a birthday. Often, it is the little things we do for people (such as letting workers with long commutes leave early on a snowy day, or springing for dinner when overtime is required) that determine their loyalty to you.

Be Open to Ideas

You may think the sign of a good manager is to have a department where everybody is busy at work on their assigned tasks. But if your people are merely “doing their jobs,” they're only working at about half their potential. A truly productive department is one in which every employee is actively thinking of better, more efficient methods of working – ways in which to produce a higher quality product, in less time, at lower cost.

To get this kind of innovation from your people, you have to be receptive to new ideas; what's more, you have to encourage your people to produce new ideas. Incentives are one way. You can offer a cash bonus, time off, a gift. But a more potent form of motivation is simply the employee's knowing that management does listen and does put employee suggestions and ideas to work. Quality Circles, used by Westinghouse and other major firms, are one way of putting this into action... The old standby, the suggestion box, is another time tested method.

And when you listen to new ideas, be open minded. Don't shoot down a suggestion before you've heard it in full. Many of us are too quick, too eager, to show off our own experience and knowledge and say that something won't work because "we've tried it before" or "we don't do it that way." Well, maybe you did try it before, but that doesn't mean it won't work now. And having done things a certain way in the past doesn't mean you've necessarily been doing them the best way. A good manager is open-minded and receptive to new ideas.

Give Your People a Place to Go

If a worker doesn't have a place to go a position to aspire to, a promotion to work toward, then his job is a dead end. And dead-end workers are usually bored, unhappy, and unproductive. Organize your department so that everyone has opportunity for advancement, so that there is a logical progression up the ladder in terms of title, responsibility, status, and pay. If this isn't possible because your department is too small, perhaps that progression must inevitably lead to jobs outside the department. If so, don't hold people back; instead, encourage them to aim for these goals so that they will put forth their best efforts during all the years they are with you.

Section 8

Improving Your Telephone Skills

The telephone has a great deal of power, yet as a basic business instrument it is often misused. How many times have you been put off by a receptionist who gives you a grilling to rival that given Al Capone by the FBI? Or been greeted by an anonymous “hold, please” and left hanging in a silent void for what seems like an eternity? At best, these kinds of encounters are annoying. At worst, they can create a negative impression and sour a relationship.

The first contact many people have with you is over the phone. They probably will form a lasting impression of you on the basis of that conversation. Fortunately, with a little tact and attention to what you say and how you say it, you can use the phone as an effective tool in getting and keeping cooperation, sales, and goodwill.

Mind Your Manners

Promptness counts. Answer your calls on the first or second ring, if possible. This gives the caller the impression that you are responsive and efficient. Occasionally, you may have to delay answering a call to finish an urgent task or because you were momentarily away from your desk. But no office phone should ring more than four times before being picked up by someone. Otherwise, you may risk losing a valuable call.

When you answer, identify yourself. A “hello” is not sufficient; give your name and department. By saying “Mike Bugalowski, Quality Control,” you give callers the information they need, and you also prompt them to identify

themselves in return. This also shows that you are businesslike and ready to be of service.

Apply this rule even when picking up the phone for someone else. Say, "Tod Pitlow's office, Mike Bugalowski speaking," so callers will know someone is taking responsibility for helping them.

Answer and place your own calls. Screening calls via a receptionist or secretary wastes time and annoys callers. If possible, answer your own phone. Callers will appreciate the fact that you're available for them and that they don't have to be put through the third degree to reach you. Similarly, placing your own calls circumvents the ego game of seeing which executive waits for the other.

If you must have your calls screened in order to work efficiently, have your secretary do so politely and briefly. Don't make callers feel as if they're being discriminated against. Instead of saying, "Who's calling?" or worse, "Who is this?" which challenges the caller, ask, "May I tell him who is calling, please?"

If you are available to speak to only certain people, ask your secretary to first say that you're in a meeting and then ask, "May I tell her who called?" If the caller is someone you want to talk to, your assistant can then say, "Here he is now," or "Let me see if I can get her for you."

Offer an explanation as to why someone is unavailable. Better to say, "He's in a meeting right now," "She's on another line," or "He's out of the office," than simply "He's unavailable," or "She can't come to the phone." By giving more information to callers, you come across as being honest and up front, so they are less likely to feel they are being lied to or discriminated against.

Always offer to help the caller yourself, or find someone who can, or take a message and personally see that it gets to the right person. Don't ask the person to call back later – this is inconsiderate of the caller's time and money.

When screening calls, avoid using phrases that seem to challenge callers or imply that they may not be worth talking to. For example, the screening phrase, "Does he know you?" is offensive because it puts callers in the embarrassing position of having to guess whether you remember them, and it implies that any caller not known will not be able to get through to you.

Some other screening phrases to avoid (along with our reactions to them): "will she know where you're from?" (I don't know, I'm not a mind reader.) "And what is this in reference to?" (Do you want the long version or the short version?) "What company are you with?" (Does he only talk with people from companies? Too bad I'm with the IRS.) "And you're from . . . ?" (Kentucky, originally.) "And what does this concern" (His wife's gambling debt.)

People don't like to get the runaround. So if you need to transfer someone, first explain why and where you are switching the call. It's also wise to give the caller the extension or number, in case the call gets disconnected.

Cover yourself. Leaving a phone unattended is a sure fire way to lose important calls and irritate those trying to reach you. We've all had the frustrating experience of calling a business and letting the phone ring 10 or 15 times with no answer. When that happens, we get angry and think, "What a poorly run company they must be to let the phone ring so long."

If there is no one available in your office to answer your calls while you are away, have the calls transferred to a receptionist or someone else who agrees to cover for you.

Be sure to tell that person where you are going, when you will be back, and any telephone number where you can be reached. Then collect your messages and return your calls promptly.

When you take a message, listen carefully and write down everything. Get the person's name, telephone number, affiliation, and the name of the person or

department the caller is trying to reach. Even when callers are in a rush, don't be afraid to ask them to repeat spellings, pronunciations, and numbers if you didn't hear clearly the first time. Taking complete, accurate messages avoids confusion, and ensures that calls can be returned promptly.

No one likes to be put on hold. But if it's necessary, first explain why you need to leave the line, how long you'll be gone, and then ask if the caller can hold. Wait for a reply; no one likes being put on hold before they have a chance to object. But when you ask, you'll find that most people say "OK" and appreciate your courtesy. When you return to the phone, thank the caller by name for waiting.

Make sure the caller isn't on hold for more than 2 minutes. If you need to be away from the phone longer than that, ask if the caller would prefer that you call back. Promise to call back at a specific time, and do so. Break out your voice smile.

Everyone has a bad day now and then, but it's not smart to show it in person or on the phone. Anger, impatience, or simple boredom can come through a phone line quite clearly and make a caller defensive or nervous. If you are unpleasant or brusque on the phone, people may go out of their way to avoid dealing with you.

So, no matter what your mood, strive to be pleasant and alert throughout a conversation. When people call at a bad time, ask if you can get back to them again and mention a specific time when you will call them back.

A good rule to remember is to treat callers the way you would guests in your office or home. You'll win their respect and goodwill. Courtesy and attentiveness can only help you and your company in improved public image, better customer relationships, and increased sales.

Telephone Techniques

Have you ever had to hold the receiver about a foot away from your ear to dim the voice on the other end? Or, conversely, have you ever strained to make out what the person on the other end was saying? Then you know how important a good speaking voice is in effective telephone communications.

When you make a call, put the receiver against your ear, hold the mouthpiece close to your lips, and speak clearly in a normal tone of voice. If people can't understand you because you talk too fast, make a conscious effort to slow down. These tips may seem elementary, but they can help prevent garbled communications and listener frustration.

Brief conversations save time, and your listener will be grateful for them. Everyone enjoys a certain degree of personal conversation, such as "How are you?" or "How was your trip?" but lengthy personal discourses or general ramblings on are inappropriate, and probably boring to most people.

It's a good idea, therefore, to stick to the point and to be prepared when you are planning or expecting a call. We suggest you write down the major points you want to cover on a sheet of paper; when you talk, look at the sheet and check off each point as it is discussed. This technique will help you keep on the subject and avoid getting sidetracked. If an unexpected subject comes up, and you need to get more information, explain this to the caller and make arrangements to call back with the answers.

Be gracious and pleasant when ending a call even if you're not happy with the outcome. Thank the person for his or her time; summarize points agreed on or actions to be taken; and say "good-bye" so the other person will know you are finished. In fact, it's best to let the caller hang up first, so that you don't cut him or her off inadvertently. And when you hang up, do it gently. A slammed receiver creates jangled nerves and a negative impression.

Following these simple tips will put you ahead of the crowd in dealing with colleagues, superiors, suppliers, and clients. True, you may find yourself handling more calls because people like dealing with you, but this brings with it increased opportunities for success. By mastering the fine art of telephone conversation, you will enhance your reputation as well as your company's.

Section 9

Improving Your Reading Efficiency and Skills

As John Naisbitt points out in his best-selling book *Megatrends*, we are in the midst of a transition from an industrial society to an information society. Because of this “information explosion,” the amount of reading we must do to keep up in our industry is growing almost daily.

In-baskets across the country are overflowing with journals, reports, papers, memos, foams, and letters – more material than anyone could possibly hope to digest.

But however tempting it may be to dump that towering pile of mail into the wastebasket, such is not a practical solution to the challenge of staying informed and competitive in your job. A better idea is to develop a systematic method for dealing with the daily influx of mail. The following 12 tips can put you in control of the printed word, instead of vice versa:

- 1) Be selective in the number of magazines, newsletters, and trade journals you subscribe to or receive. Analyze which give you the best return on your reading time and cancel those that are borderline, repetitive or offer irrelevant information.

2) Figure out which sections of each publication are most useful to you. After reading one or two issues of a journal, you develop a feel for which columns, sections and features you should read in detail, skim or skip altogether.

3) Use the magazine's table of contents to distinguish between useful and non useful information. If you can't read the articles right away, clip or photocopy items of interest and put them in a folder or in-basket for future reading. This keeps your stack of "must reading" whittled down to a manageable level.

4) Use waiting or travel time to catch up on office reading. Whether you are on the bus or train, in the air, waiting in bank lines or even on hold on the telephone, these spare moments, normally wasted, can be put to good use by reading.

5) Set aside a specific time slot each day for reading. An hour is usually sufficient. Pick a time when your schedule is relatively quiet and you expect few interruptions. Lunchtime or early morning may be the best periods. Keeping distractions to a minimum helps improve concentration.

6) If possible, read demanding or crucial material when your energy level is high. Some people work best early in the morning, whereas others get more done at night. Figure out when your energy peaks occur, and do your most demanding reading during those times.

7) When reading difficult material requiring retention, take notes. Writing down important points aids in comprehension and memorization.

8) Take breaks. Studies show that most people can maintain good concentration for about 50 minutes, after which they need a 10-minute break to absorb information and prepare for further work. Forcing yourself to continue reading when you are mentally tired is ineffective and inefficient, as you tend to reread the same material over and over, and at a slower pace.

9) Develop a filing system for saving information on relevant or interesting topics. Five to ten manila folders will do the trick. For example, if you are an analytical chemist you might have folders labeled “gas chromatographs,” “liquid chromatography,” “u/v/visible spectrophotometers,” “atomic absorption,” etc. This kind of system helps you “capture” valuable facts and puts them right at your fingertips.

10) Set up a system for passing along pertinent articles to others. Give your secretary the names and addresses of friends, co-workers, clients and colleagues with whom you regularly correspond. When you want to pass along a pertinent clipping, you simply tear out the article, attach a note saying, for example, “send to Terry Henderson,” and have your secretary do the rest.

11) Before you sit down to read, make sure you have everything you need. This includes a pen, highlighter, note pad or index cards (if you're reading study material) and the complete text of the article.

When reading trade magazines, tear out the reader service card and keep the card and a pen in front of you as you scan the magazine. By doing so, you can quickly get more information about the products mentioned in an ad or article by circling the appropriate key number on the card.

12) Take a speed-reading course or buy a book that teaches you how to read faster. Although most people can benefit from an analysis of their reading habits, this especially applies if you are a slow reader. Do you sub vocalize (say words to yourself as you read)? Do you read everything at the same speed? Speed-reading can teach you to use bad habits and develop new, efficient ones through training and practice. (One book we recommend is *Speed-reading*, published by John Wiley & Sons, New York.)

As a guideline, an efficient reading speed for many types of nontechnical materials is between 400 and 800 words per minute. Slower speeds of 150 to 250

words per minute are appropriate for technical material. You may want to improve your speed if you are reading below this level.

Section 10

How to Improve Your Negotiating Skills

Many engineers look upon negotiating as an unpleasant, stressful chore to be avoided at all costs. And, because they're uncomfortable with negotiating and the confrontation and risk taking it entails, these engineers frequently get the short end in bargaining sessions.

Success in negotiations can increase your salary, get you a better position, gather support for your project or department, gain approval for a budget and improve your chance for success on the job. Therefore, it pays to overcome your aversion to haggling and to improve your negotiating *skills*. *You* can gain immediate improvement simply by following the suggestions presented below.

The Win-Win Negotiation

When most of us think of negotiating, we assume one of two things will happen: either we'll win or we will lose. But the pros don't look at it that way. They know that a successful negotiation is one in which *both* sides feel like winners ... at least to some degree.

When you sit down to bargain, don't feel you have to win on *every* issue. Score major victories, but concede small points. Ask yourself, "What can I give up that will please the other person without putting a major dent in what I want out of this?"

Everything Is Negotiable

Many corporate workers like to think that certain company policies and procedures are unchangeable, as commandments etched in stone. The fact is, *nothing* is unchangeable and everything is negotiable.

Knowing this fact is a powerful advantage in bargaining. For example, an engineering consultant, negotiating his fee with a client, was told that the company could not go along with his request for partial payment in advance. "I don't see anything wrong with it but my hands are tied," explained the project manager. "Company policy doesn't allow payment until at least part of the work is completed."

The consultant knew better than to accept this at face value. "Bill," he replied, "I appreciate that that may be the way you normally deal with suppliers. But as an independent consultant, I receive payment up front from people who *want* to hire me. I know that this policy is just a guideline set by management and management can break it if it wants to. And I am telling you that you *have* to break it if you want me to take on this project for you." A week later, the consultant received a purchase order and a check for one-third of his fee.

The Rule of 3

Before you sit down to bargain, you should have three figures or positions fixed firmly in your mind:

The maximum – the highest figure. The most you dare ask for without fear of "blowing away" your opponent.

The minimum – the bottom line. The lowest figure you'd settle for.

The goal – a realistic figure you have a good chance of getting. The goal is probably between 50 and 75 percent of the maximum.

It pays to be optimistic and aim high when setting your maximum. For example, a scientist requesting funds to purchase a new piece of laboratory

equipment might be able to buy an adequate machine for between \$15,000 and \$50,000. If he proposes \$50,000, and management cuts his budget in half he ends up with a \$25,000 machine. But by setting his initial request 20 percent higher, at \$60,000, a cut in half would leave him with \$30,000 – and a machine with \$5,000 more in capabilities and performance.

When negotiating, try for your goal but be prepared to accept any offer between the minimum and the maximum. In some cases you may be surprised to find that the maximum is approved without argument. At other times, your opponent may not even grant you the minimum. If this happens, you may be forced to consider more drastic action such as going to your opponent's supervisor, threatening to quit, or changing jobs.

YOU Set the Rules

The person who controls the negotiation is usually the one who has set the guidelines. Make sure this person is you – and not your opponent.

To do this, say, “Before we get started, I'd like to go over the situation as it stands, and outline what we hope to accomplish here.” Then go on to state things as you see them. The other person will generally agree, interjecting only to make a few minor modifications to what is basically *your* point of view. Thus, when you begin to negotiate; you're in control of the situation – because you defined it.

You Pick the Time and Place

To succeed in a negotiation, you must be prepared physically, mentally and psychically.

To throw you off guard, the other person may try to force you into a surprise negotiation. A boss, for example, sticks his head in the door and makes a request to which he wants an immediate answer. Or, the phone rings, and a customer suddenly wants an on-the-spot price quotation on a project you and he discussed in vague terms months ago.

Don't be bullied into a negotiation you're not prepared for. Say to the boss, "Gee, I'm in the middle of a rush job. Why don't I drop by your office later this afternoon?" Say to the customer, "I'm with someone right now, and it will take me some time to put the figures together. I will call you back tomorrow." No reasonable person would deny these requests, and you will gain time to prepare your case. You'll also enjoy the advantage that comes from holding the negotiation at a time and place of your choosing.

An Arsenal of Facts

The best way to prepare for a negotiation is to gather all the facts, statistics, precedents, case histories, documents and other evidence supporting your position.

Printed evidence is especially potent. People are skeptical of oral arguments, but they assume that words printed in an article, book or report are true. Collect surveys, studies and article clippings, make copies, and highlight or underline key facts to make them leap off the page. Unleash this powerful support when you feel you are losing ground on a key point.

You may end up using only a small percentage of this material, but you'll negotiate with greater confidence knowing it is available. Experience proves that people who succeed in debates and negotiations are usually the ones who have the most facts.

Don't Be Hasty

Engineers and other people who think logically are eager to achieve what psychologists call closure. Closure is a neat, final, well-defined solution to a problem. Technical people seek closure because they are trained to find precise solutions.

But life isn't an equation; negotiations and other "people problems" can't always be wrapped up as neatly as a mathematical proof or engineering design.

When negotiating, you should expect and be willing to accept at least some ambiguity in what is resolved. If 90 percent of the issue is settled, and people in the meeting are beginning to grow restless, let the other 10 percent go for a while. *Don't* insist that every last detail be buttoned down that day; otherwise, you risk angering people and losing the ground you've gained.

On the other hand, don't start giving in to your opponent just because you're tired and cranky and ready to go home. Instead, call for a break. Sum up where you are so far, and suggest wrapping it up in a future session ... when, thanks to a few days rest and contemplation, everyone will be able to approach the situation with fresh ideas – and fresh minds.

The Human Touch

Above all, remember that you're dealing with human beings, not machines or chemicals.

You'll have an edge if you learn as much as you can about your opponents before you sit down to negotiate. Be aware of the personalities involved and adjust your “sales pitch” accordingly. Top executives, for example, usually want to get to the bottom line in a hurry. They are concerned with the “big picture” and don't want to waste time with minutia.

Technical managers, on the other hand, like to prove that they've kept up with the latest developments in the industry ... even though they're managers now, and not working engineers. So, before they approve your project, they might want you to explain every detail down to the last nut, bolt, fan and filter.

The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.” You may dislike your opponent or be angry at him for blocking your way, but your negotiations with him should be civil and friendly, not argumentative and hostile. Keep your cool when attacked,

and respond with sound arguments and supporting facts, not an outburst of temper or shouting.

Try to highlight, whenever possible, the common goals and points of agreement between you. After all, this isn't war, it's a negotiation. The two of you have, for the most part, similar goals; it's your ideas on how to achieve these goals that differ. When responding, use phrases that show your empathy with the other person's position, such as "That's a good point" or "I agree with most of that, but ... " Make the other person *feel* like a winner and both of you *will* be.

Section 11

Ten Ways to Reduce Stress on the Job

For many chemists, corporate life can be a pressure cooker. Here are ten simple techniques you can use to reduce stress and tension on the job.

Hobbies. The best way to take your mind off your work is with a hobby that fills your free time. Pick something you can't get on the job. For example, if you sit at a desk all day, try hiking, camping, bicycle riding or some other physical activity. If you feel your job doesn't provide an outlet for your creativity, take up painting, music or another activity that satisfies your creative side. A chemist should not restrict his leisure pursuits solely to scientific and technical activities.

Vacations. Many people boast of going years without a vacation. But it's a mistake never to take one. Sitting on the beach, under the sun with the waves pounding at your feet is a marvelous way to let off some of the pressure that's been building inside you. How long should your vacation be? It depends on your personality. Some people find they need at least a week or two to unwind fully. Others say taking that much time off creates a backlog of work that just adds to

their stress when they return to the lab. Those people may be better with several short vacations throughout the year.

Screening. I feel that working alone, in long stretches, is far more practical and productive than working in the corporate environment, where your open door is an invitation for everyone to interrupt you, at any time, regardless of how busy you are. If you find these constant interruptions stressful, it may pay you to screen calls and visitors. Take calls when you want to; if you're busy, have someone take a message so you can return the call later.

Unlisted phone number. Few things are as intrusive as a work related phone calls received at home. If you are bothered by too many such calls from subordinates or supervisors, consider getting an unlisted number. If company policy dictates that people at work must have access to your home number, you might want to buy a telephone answering machine. The machine lets you monitor incoming calls without picking up the phone.

Privacy. Modular offices and open work spaces are popular with managers who think constant employee interaction is a good thing. But these setups deprive workers of privacy, and lack of privacy in turn adds stress and reduces productivity. You should consider an office setup in which all employees have small, private offices, with doors they can shut, to give them a place to think.

Dual offices. My Uncle Max, a college professor, has two offices: his regular office and a small, "secret" office tucked away in the basement of another department's building. Max goes there to unwind, to work away from the crowds for a few hours, when the pressures of students, faculty meetings and research overwhelm him.

Delegation. Do you have too much work to do? Delegate it. Don't think you're the only one who can do your work. You'd be surprised at what your co-workers can accomplish for you.

Divide and conquer. If you're faced with a big task and a short deadline, break the assignment up into many smaller segments and do a part of the job every day. Having to write only one page a day for ten days seems a lot less formidable a task than having to produce a ten page paper in two weeks.

Deep breathing. Psychologists have developed a number of relaxation techniques that can help reduce stress on the job. All can be performed easily at work. One of the most basic techniques is deep breathing. It relieves tension by increasing your oxygen intake. To practice it, sit in a comfortable position with your hands on your stomach. Inhale deeply and slowly. Let your stomach expand as much as possible. Hold your breath for five seconds. Then exhale slowly through pursed lips, as if whistling. Repeat the cycle three or four times.

Visualizations. To escape from the stress of the "real world," close your door, sit back and spend the next 10 minutes in a pleasant daydream. This short "mental vacation" provides a nice tension reducing break.

About the author:

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports, and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar

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He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News*, *Writer's Digest*, *Amtrak Express*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople*.

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and the American Marketing Association.

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Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Web sites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs.

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Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC,

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