



C.A.R.E.
Career and Resilience Education Program

Communication Skills for the workplace and everyday life.

Diversity in the workplace has never been so apparent. Many different generations, sexes and cultural backgrounds all work together in the modern Police Force. Team structures are changing frequently and new team members need to be brought up to speed quickly to maintain performance.

While the fundamentals of policing are the same, processes and procedures may differ from LAC to LAC and station to station. Policing is a difficult profession and to ensure everyone works together, and objectives are understood, effective communication skills are vital. It doesn't matter what rank or position you work at – from a Probationary Constable right up to the highest ranking Commissioned Officer – ensuring a message is communicated correctly is fundamental to success at work.

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What is Communication?

Put simply, communication is transferring information from one person to another. It is about getting a message across effectively – whether it is to an individual, a team, an entire Command, or the entire NSW Police Force.

Effective communication isn't about sounding good or using big fancy words. It is about getting your desired message across and being understood. Effective communication can positively influence any situation.

Many police officers underestimate the importance of having good core communication skills and the impact that poor – or no – communication can have on an individual and the workplace.

Types of Communication

Written Communication

Different types of written communication include letters, emails, memos, intranet articles, meeting minutes and using social media. It can also include using graphs, pictures, posters and PowerPoint presentations. This is most useful for reports, COPS events, taking statements and briefs of evidence.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is used frequently throughout your working day, including speaking to your colleagues and members of the public, attending conferences and meetings, delivering presentations and having telephone conversations. This form of communication is more likely to be appropriate for such times as getting information from victims, witnesses or offenders; speaking with community groups; giving evidence in court; or liaising with colleagues and member of the public..

Non Verbal Communication

Different types of non-verbal communication include your body language, posture, eye contact and even how you dress. You can tell a lot by what a person is thinking, feeling or saying by their non-verbal communication. As police officer, you become very skilled at reading body language. It is an essential skill.

Not all communication channels are appropriate for every situation and it will depend on the message you are trying to communicate and, most importantly, your audience.

For example:

- An email is not a good way to deal with a performance issue or to deliver sensitive information, such as a critical incident or death message;
- Putting an important piece of information on a noticeboard without advertising it first – such as sending a memo – would be ineffective as it may not reach all intended readers;
- Introducing a new policy or procedure would not be effective if done via email alone as you can't guarantee everyone will read it and understand it. It should also be communicated using a team meeting or briefing.

Put yourself in the shoes of the audience and think about who they are and what do you need them to know? No matter how well you understand something, remember that your audience doesn't know it. How can you make them understand with as little confusion as possible?

Communication Planning Strategies

Have you ever received an email or a letter and felt that what was in it wasn't relevant to you? Or sat through a presentation thinking "this has nothing to do with me"? This can have a negative impact on the message trying to be delivered.

The best communications start with good planning – whether it is general day-to-day information or major changes in your station or Command.

First you need to understand what it is you are trying to communicate.

Then, most importantly, *who* is your audience? What do they need to know and what is the best way for them to understand what you are trying to communicate? Communication should be composed and delivered in a form that can be easily understood by your target audience and relevant to them.

Another important planning strategy is *how* you should communicate to the audience for maximum effect. Messages should be communicated differently depending on the situation. For example: Some detailed information may be best given over email so people can refer back to it, whereas a performance issue is better addressed face-to-face so you can use the correct body language and tone, and you can read the person's reaction by their non-verbal communication.

Another important thing to consider *timing* – when is the right time to communicate to the audience to ensure maximum effectiveness?

For example, you should not distribute a branch newsletter late in the day or near a shift changeover - you may miss half of your target audience.

Before communicating, it is important to plan for it – know **who** you are communicating to and **why**, **what** you are trying to tell them, **when** you are going to tell them and **how** you are going to tell them.

7 'Cs' of Communication

Once you have planned your communication it is important to ensure you communicate well so that your message is understood.

A way to ensure this is to follow the 7 C's of communication. These simple steps can be applied for either verbal or written communication.

Communication should be:

1. Clear
2. Concise
3. Concrete
4. Coherent
5. Correct
6. Complete
7. Courteous

1. *Clear*

Be clear about your message and ensure it has purpose.

Make sure you fully understand it, otherwise your audience won't.

Minimise the amount of information in each sentence. The audience should be able to read your message, or listen to you speak, and understand what is being said.

You don't want people to make assumptions about what they 'think' you mean as this can lead to the information being misinterpreted

Ensure your communication fits your audience. There is no need to use fancy words or acronyms if they won't be understood by your audience.

2. *Concise*

Keep your message short and succinct. Be specific and avoid repetition.

If something can be written or said in one sentence, don't use three

3. *Concrete*

Concrete communication means sticking to specific facts. Avoid being vague. Give your audience information so that it is meaningful to them.

Use facts or figures to support what you are saying. If your message is solid it will avoid misinterpretation.

4. *Correct*

Always ensure your communication is accurate. If you aren't sure if the information is correct, don't communicate it!

When writing, ensure your correspondence is free of spelling and grammar errors and make sure you spell people's names correctly.

5. *Coherent*

Keep your communication logical.

Ensure it always relates to your central message.

Keep to the point!

6. *Complete*

Make sure you give the audience all the relevant information they need to understand the message.

If they need to do something afterwards, make sure they know what it is.

No 'hidden messages'.

7. *Courteous*

The information you need to communicate will not always be pleasant or welcome. It can sometimes be awkward, particularly if it involves a discussion about a performance issue.

It always helps to be courteous when communicating. Keep your tones neutral and use good body language. Be open and honest and treat all situations with sensitivity.

It is particularly important to be mindful of tones in written correspondence as these can be easily misinterpreted by the reader. You will always put your best foot forward if you are courteous.

Body Language and Non-Verbal Communication

Often the difference between what we intend to say and what people understand comes down to our body language and non-verbal communication.

The importance of using correct body language – and knowing how to spot the signs of disengaged body language – can allow you to communicate more effectively in all aspects of your life. It can be used everywhere – with friends, family, colleagues or with dealing with the public.

If you watch people interact their body language can often tell many stories. Do they sit with their arms crossed or their body turned away? Do they maintain little or no eye contact? Is their posture stooped? This could mean a lack of confidence, nervousness, disengagement, defensiveness or even lying.

Not only will you notice other people's body language but you also need to be careful with your own body language.

Examples of different types of body language are:

Posture

If a person is standing tall with their shoulders back it could mean they feel confident and self assured. If they have their arms crossed, their body turned physically away from you or they are fiddling with things around them, they may be defensive, disengaged or even lying. A distinct sign of disengagement is when people are stooped in their chair or have their shoulders slumped and arms folded while standing.

It is equally important to sit in an appropriate manner in a professional environment – it doesn't help to sit with your legs open and your arms behind your head while a staff member tries to broach an issue with you.

Eye Contact

If a person maintains good eye contact it shows that they are confident, engaged, open and honest. However, if they have poor eye contact, their eyes are downcast or glazed, it could mean they lack confidence, are disengaged or even on the defence about a situation. Rapid eye movement can suggest someone is lying to you.

Facial expressions

People who show very little facial expressions and 'don't give much away' tend to be disinterested. Yawning is another classic symptom of disengagement.

Speech:

People who speak at moderate pace with an even tone are often confident and engaged and wanting to participate. Those who speak very quietly or quickly, clear their throat, or start to stammer, are often lying but can also be uncomfortable in the situation they are in.

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