



Lecture & Presentation Notes

BASIC SECURITY TRAINING

INTRODUCTION TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

COMPILED, WRITTEN & PRESENTED BY
Robert Ing, DSc, FAPSc, FInstMP(UK)

Reading Time: 30 minutes

INTRODUCTION TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Compiled, Written & Presented by
Robert Ing, DSc, FAPSc, FInstMP(UK)

Effective communication skills are fundamental to success in many aspects of life. As a Security Guard you will have to communicate with individuals of varying levels of education and whose primary language may not necessarily be English. A misunderstanding because information given or received is not understood is a risk, that if not managed could lead to embarrassment, inconvenience, or even worse the escalation of a volatile situation.

Effective communication is a two way process, so improving communication involves both how we send and receive messages. Initially, this can be broken down into two functions. (1) How we communicate information and (2) How we interpret what has been communicated.

We communicate information in 4 ways. These are (1) by speaking, (2) by writing, (3) through body language, and (4) by our action. We interpret and respond to information that has been communicated in 4 ways. These are (1) by listening, (2) by reading, (3) through observing body language, and (4) by how a person acts.

In order to better understand how to effectively communicate, let's look at ways that you, as a person can improve your communication skills and manage the risk of not being properly understood or misunderstanding what someone is trying to communicate to you.



LEARN TO LISTEN

Listening is not the same as hearing; learn to listen not only to the words being spoken but how they are being spoken and the non-verbal messages sent with them. Try not to think about what to say next while listening; instead clear your mind and focus on the message being received.

Security Guards must remain neutral and non-judgmental during a conversation; this means trying not to take sides or form opinions in the conversation. Listening is also about patience - pauses and short periods of silence should be accepted.

Don't be tempted to jump in with questions or comments every time there are a few seconds of silence. Give the speaker time to explore and communicate their thoughts and feelings.

As a listener, you must not only focus fully on the speaker but also actively show verbal and non-verbal signs of listening. These signs could include using the phrases "I see," "yes," "indeed," or "I can understand" infrequently; and nodding your head, making occasional eye contact, leaning slightly forward to better hear the speaker, and avoiding looking at your watch or telephone screen while the person is speaking.

Where you stand when speaking with someone is also important because if you stand too close you may make the individual feel threatened or in the case of a volatile situation or aggressive person, you may put your own physical safety at risk. If you stand too far away, this indicates a sign of disrespect and lack of interest on your part which could lead the speaker to become frustrated. The ideal distance you should be when having a conversation with someone as a security guard is approximately between 1.2 metres to 1.8 metres.

Quite often, as a Security Guard you may need to clarify and confirm what the other person has said in order to avoid any confusion. In effective communication, clarification involves offering back to the speaker the essential meaning of what they have said, as understood by you, the listener. This ensures your, the listener's understanding, is correct and can immediately identify any areas of confusion or misunderstanding.

Clarification is important in many situations especially when what is being communicated is difficult in some way. Communication can be 'difficult' for many reasons, perhaps sensitive emotions are being discussed, language barriers - or you are listening to some complex information or following instructions that may be new to you. As well, the act of clarification in a conversation reassures the speaker you are genuinely interested in understanding what they are saying.

Clarifying involves asking questions or occasionally summarising what the speaker has said to you. You must ask for clarification when you cannot make sense of the speaker's responses. As a security guard, the messages a speaker may attempt to send can be highly complex, involving many different people, issues, places and times. Clarifying helps you to sort these out and also to check the speaker's priorities.

The type of clarification questions you ask are important because they must be non-judgmental and encourage meaningful feedback from the speaker. In a sensitive environment or potentially volatile situation, the right sort of non-directive questioning can enable the speaker to describe their viewpoint more fully. There are two main types of questions; open-ended questions and closed-ended questions.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions allow for long narrative responses and potentially contain not only the information asked but additional pieces of useful information. Common open-ended questions often begin with “how?,” “why?,” or “when?” It is very important that you as the listener be aware of, and pay close attention to identify any additional pieces of information offered in the response to an open-ended question. As well, in asking any open-ended question, it is recommended you avoid starting the question off with “Why . . .”. Starting a question off with “why” could be construed subconsciously by many as aggressive or confrontational, thus the response you get will be limited or reserved. In a volatile or emotional situation, you should not ask a “Why” question as this may add to the tension. Rather, reword your question and make it a “How” question. “How” questions are much less aggressive and confrontational. They also encourage the person to speak more freely and in-depth about the subject matter. As well with children, if you ask a “why” question, you may typically get a “because” response with nothing further. If you change your “why” to a “how” question, the child quite often will offer up a more descriptive narrative as a response. As well, a “why” question requires the respondent to give an intellectual response vs. a “how” question providing the opportunity for a perceptive response (how they see the situation)..

Examples of changing a “why” question to a “how” question

“Why did you do that?” change this to “How did you decide to do that?”

“Why do you feel this way?” change this to “How did you come to feel this way?”

“Why does this always happen?” change to “How did this happen?”

Examples of Open-ended Questions

“When did you first start feeling like this?” “Tell me what happened?”

“When you said ... what did you mean?”

CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

Closed-ended questions are those that are answered with a one word or number response and do not encourage speakers to be open about, or expand on their thoughts. Typical one word responses to closed-ended questions are “yes,” “no,” or “maybe.” Common closed-ended questions often begin with “did you?,” “were you?,” or “how many?” A variation of the closed-ended question may contain a short list of limited choice responses such as; “Would you like coffee or tea?,” “Do you have a cat, dog or goldfish?,” or “Did you enter the building from the main or side doors?” It is important to understand when you ask someone a closed-ended question with options, you are making an assumption that in the real world, these are the available options to this individual, and in so doing you have indirectly influenced them by limiting their available response. Closed-ended questions with options are also useful if you have a speaker who tends to ramble off topic and you need to politely direct them back to the topic at hand. Closed-ended questions invite a short focused answer. Responses to closed-ended questions can often (but not always) be either right or wrong. Closed-ended questions are usually easy to answer, as the choice of answer is limited they may be effectively used early in conversations to encourage participation from introverted speakers.

Examples of Closed-ended Questions

“Did you always feel like this?”

“Were you aware of feeling this way?”

“How many people were involved?”

The best questions to determine unknown information or to initiate a conversation, are open-ended questions as they give the speaker choice in how to respond, whereas closed-ended questions allow only very limited responses. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions are useful, dependent upon the circumstances. Answers, responses to questions that are demanded or provided under duress or other emotional pressure may not be completely truthful nor reliable regardless of the type of question used. Answers, responses that are given to questions as they arise as part of a normal conversation have a greater probability of being truthful and factual.

Being an effective communicator has a lot to do with how you ask questions. In a volatile or emotionally charged situation, asking questions allows us to find out more about the respondent; this can be useful when attempting to build rapport, determining emotional state of mind and to show empathy. As well, questions may be used to encourage people to think about something differently and more deeply. It is important to point out that while you are asking questions you are in control of the conversation.

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Before, during and after you enter into a conversation with a person, it is to your benefit to be aware of their emotional state. Before, or as being approached by someone who will engage you in a conversation you may be able to tell their emotional state by observing the following:

Face – Do they have a smile on their face, are their cheekbones raised, is their head held up? These are signs the individual may be calm, content or happy. Are there tears in their eyes, is their head bowed down? These are signs the individual may be upset. Are their eyes squinted, are they shaking their head, are the muscles in their face tense? These are signs the individual might be in an aggressive mood.

Body – Is their body posture straight? This could be a sign of confidence and calmness. Is their body posture slightly hunched? This could be a sign of emotional upset or possibly anger.

Hands and arms – Are their arms down by their side with hands open? This could indicate a relaxed state. Are their arms across their body with hands closed or clenched? This could indicate they may be upset or angry.

As well, you as the listener also telegraph the same emotional information to the speaker, so while the speaker may not have been briefed on specific body language, how they see your body positioned will intuitively and subconsciously have an effect on how they respond to you. If instead of making occasional eye contact with them you stare into their eyes; this could be interpreted as a sign of aggression on your part or if you seldom look into their eyes but look around or through them, this could be a sign of disinterest and lack of attention to their concerns. Speaking with them while your hands are clenched, in your pockets or behind your back may make them uneasy as it might appear you are hiding something or going to be aggressive with them. It is much better to keep your hands open and in plain view as this helps bridge trust and openness. As well, avoid crossing your arms across your chest or torso while speaking to them because this communicates you may not be necessarily honest or open about what you are saying to them, or that you do not believe what they are saying.

Determining the emotional state of an individual cannot be done by just one item from what we have mentioned but by observing more than one of these, plus your own intuition. The emotional state of an individual will be confirmed by what they say, how they say it, how they respond to you, and how they act. As a Security Guard it is in your best to keep these factors in mind.

When in conversation with anyone, it is recommended you make and maintain eye contact occasionally throughout the conversation and use first names where appropriate. More importantly, you must carefully consider the emotional effect of what you are saying and communicate within the norms of behaviour and culture acceptable to the other person. When in a conversation with a member of the public, while they may tell you personal details about themselves, it is in the interest of maintaining professionalism that you do not share personal details about yourself or any other individuals.

When speaking with someone, your tone of voice, volume level, the level of vocabulary you use and the speed of your speech are important contributing factors to how the conversation may go. A regular, low to medium tone of voice, where speech is at a slow steady pace with not more than a grade 6 or year 6 vocabulary at a volume level of 54 dB (decibels) to 63 dB (decibels) will put a person at ease. A high tone of voice, with rushed speech, with words that are not understood at volume levels above 63 dB (decibels) will make a person nervous, anxious and perhaps even aggressive. A decibel is a unit of measurement for volume or loudness. Normal human conversation is between 54 to 63 decibels; by comparison an indoor smoke alarm is 95 decibels, a rock concert in a theatre is 100 decibels, an emergency vehicle siren is 115 decibels, and a shotgun is 160 to 165 decibels. If you speak to someone in a fast rate of speed, they in turn will reply back to you at this rate; and this will increase the emotional level of the entire dialogue. Likewise, if you speak to someone at a slower than normal rate of speed, they will respond accordingly and this will result in a calming effect. As well, if someone were to start a conversation with you at a fast rate of speech, you can calm them down and take control of the conversation by not matching their rate of speech but by slowing the rate of speech in your response.

In our discussion, we have focused on you, as a Security Guard having a face-to-face conversation with another individual. However, the same information we have covered also applies to when you speak to someone over the telephone, without the body language of course. Of particular use in telephone conversations will be the listening, questioning, summarising skills and voice considerations.

The term Tactical Communications is used to describe the ability to use questioning, summarising, the application of body language and speech characteristics by the security guard to de-escalate and intervene in a potentially volatile situation. As well, these factors are also used by the security guard in their observation of an individual to determine a potential risk or threat.



Effective communication in reading and writing is a critical factor for any security guard. While we have discussed many key issues in our monograph on report writing, there are some additional aspects you need to be aware of.

Learn to read to understand.

Reading is not the same as reading to understand; learn to read not only the words and sentences but as you read, create a picture in your mind as to what has been written. Try to follow the logical sequence of events as they have been introduced in the written document. If necessary, write brief one line points or create a graphic picture of what has been conveyed in the writing if what has been written is difficult to follow. Then, based on your own notes and having read the document; summarise in your own words what the writer was trying to convey. In doing this, you may have a better understanding of what the writer was trying to convey and how to best respond to the writer should a response be required.

Write to be understood.

When writing, it is important that you put your thoughts, your message in a logical, step-by-step sequence, as they occurred. You must build on each idea or the information you need to convey by stacking each piece one on top of the other. Once completed, your writing should relate the information, in a natural order that is easy to follow.

When writing, you should always strive to write using a grade 6 or year 6 vocabulary and avoid using abbreviations or slang, so that your writing may be understood by anyone without further explanation. Before submitting your writing, carefully review it for spelling or grammatical errors. For spelling, the best dictionary is the Oxford English Dictionary. Once you have checked for spelling and grammatical errors, read your writing out loud to yourself. If it sounds good and is easy to read, you have achieved your goal. If it doesn't, you may have to go back and change or add some words or sentences.

Please be sure to carefully review the monograph on report writing for help on constructing a narrative or chronological report.



ROBERT ING

DSc, FAPSc, FInstMP(UK)

Robert Ing is a forensic intelligence specialist and has appeared on North American news networks on the issues of technology crime, computer security, privacy and identity theft. With over 25 years experience in the public and private safety and security sectors, he has worked in the biomedical, technical, privacy and risk management aspects of safety and security.

He is an approved instructor for the Ontario Security Guard Curriculum, an Ontario CPO approved training provider instructor and Ontario TSSA training program instructor.

For more articles by Dr. Robert Ing please visit

www.drroberting.com