

chapter 1

Business and Professional Excellence in the Workplace

Chapter Objectives:

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

1. define professional excellence and communication,
2. identify business and professional communication contexts,
3. understand the components of the communication model,
4. define verbal and nonverbal communication,
5. identify and explain the four KEYS to communication in the workplace, and
6. discuss communication and professional excellence from an ethical perspective.

Miranda graduated with her associate's degree from a reputable community college and landed her dream job. She was shocked when she was let go at the end of her probationary period. She thought she was doing excellent work. She did have an issue with one of her coworkers, Dan, but she did not believe that was the problem. She made sure to discuss Dan's bad attitude with her boss several times so that her boss would know she had done nothing wrong. Now, she had been late to work on more than one occasion, but she always stayed late to make up the time. Plus she was really good at her job. In fact, she considered herself to be far more knowledgeable than the older staff members. At least twice a week, she would have to tell them about a better way to do things. They were really behind the times. She really knew her stuff. Why would they let her go?

Daryl was the leading computer tech in his company. He was well liked by his coworkers, who found his quirky personality, corny jokes, and eccentric style of dress endearing. In addition, he had a solid reputation for being knowledgeable and dependable. Yet he was repeatedly passed over for promotions to management. Why wasn't Daryl being considered?

Crystal was preparing for a meeting with her "big" boss. She feared she would be fired today because her store had the worst turnover rate in the district, with two of her highest performing

employees resigning in the past month. She was not sure what was going on. She never had an issue with either one of those employees, unlike a few of her other workers who were her real concern. These other employees were not pulling their weight. They came to work late, took long lunch breaks, and would leave their stations to take personal calls. To make matters worse, they were often rude to the other employees as well as to the customers. Crystal had talked to them repeatedly about changing their ways. She even took them out for lunch every week or so to try to encourage them to perform more professionally. But nothing seemed to work. Why were her best employees leaving and her low-performing employees not improving?

John gave a big presentation today at work. He had spent hours and hours working on his PowerPoint slides. They were loaded with information—lots of statistics and charts. In fact, he had more than 50 slides in his 20-minute speech. When he began speaking, he was a little nervous. Because he had spent most of his time working on the slides, he did not have much time to practice. Still, he had the slides to read, and he thought the presentation went well. However, his audience seemed uninterested when he was speaking, and no one approached him after the speech to praise him for a job well done. Why didn't his preparation pay off?

Readings these stories may have caused you to stop and think for a moment about your own communication and the role communication can and will play in your successes and failures in the workplace. You may ask yourself, “Will I be able to get an interview? Will I be considered for a promotion at work? Will I fit in at my new job? What’s the best way to run a meeting? What are the qualities of a professional presentation? How should I respond to negative coworkers?” The preceding questions are commonly asked by people entering the workplace for the first time, as well as by people changing job titles, duties, or careers. It seems that regardless of the position or the industry in which you desire to work, there is one thing that will make or break the experience: **communication**. Welcome to the world of business and professional communication. As you study business and professional communication over the course of this semester, we encourage you, regardless of your major, to take these principles and objectives to heart. After all, communication is the key to professional excellence, and professional excellence is the key to success.

Let us introduce ourselves as your coauthors. We approach this project with years of experience teaching communication courses such as public speaking, business and professional communication, interviewing, teamwork and leadership, organizational communication, and public relations. Balanced with our teaching experience and expert knowledge in the communication field are years of professional consulting and real-world experience in a variety of industries, including retail, manufacturing, shipping, health care, government, education, and more. We know firsthand the communication challenges you will face and the communication skills you will need to succeed. Based on our teaching and professional experience, we wrote this book for you, the student as a developing professional.

When designing this text, we talked to professors and students alike, trying to get a sense of their needs. Two themes emerged from those conversations. First, instructors and professors are frustrated because students do not read their books. As a result, class discussions, exam scores, and student learning suffer. On the flip side, students are frustrated because they find most books extremely expensive and full of information they deem as unimportant. Repeatedly, students asked, “Why can’t professors just put the stuff I need to know on a PowerPoint slide?” Our goal when writing this text is to address both problems/needs. We have tried to develop a text that speaks directly to you as a student who desires success after graduation. We realize that those of you taking this class and reading this

text are interested in different professions and are in different stages of your professional lives. Given the array of professional journeys taking place in the lives of you the readers, we have included topics that will be valuable to everyone. The topic areas of the text will focus on *entering the workplace*, *developing in the workplace*, *excelling in the workplace*, *presenting in the workplace*, and *surviving in the workplace*. We explore the experiences you will face as you transition from student to professional, and eventually to leader. You will come to understand the role of communication in successfully handling situations such as job interviewing, providing feedback to supervisors, and working in teams. As an additional feature, this text not only discusses the greatest challenges we all will face in the modern workplace, but it also provides communication strategies for overcoming those challenges. Issues such as excelling under the pressure of increasingly competitive customer service demands, managing emotions when dealing with irate customers, overcoming stress and burnout, and managing difficult people are just a few of the topics covered. We hope that this approach will engage you as both a student and a reader.

Business and Professional Excellence in Context

The text's driving theme is **professional excellence**. To demonstrate excellence as a professional, you must demonstrate excellence as a communicator. Excellence does not equate to merely communicating a message effectively or simply demonstrating communication competencies. Professional excellence means being recognized for your skills as a communicator and serving as a role model to others (see Photo 1.1). Before you begin your journey with this important topic, it's important to understand the business and professional contexts that will receive specific attention in this book. The business and professional contexts you will explore are the job-seeking process, workplace culture and diversity, interpersonal communication, team communication, communication and technology, written communication, leadership, presenting as a professional, and work-life balance. These are the contexts that will no doubt shape your experience as a professional. Keep in mind that communication is at the core of the business and professional contexts you will study in this course. Let's take a look at each one in more detail.

Landing the Job

The first context you will study in Chapter 2 is job seeking. Our approach is to provide the information you'll need to conduct a comprehensive job search and know yourself in terms of professional goals and the type of work environment you desire. Job



Photo 1.1 When you hear the word professional, who or what comes to mind? This picture illustrates one way professionals might look today.



Photo 1.2 Where would you begin to search for jobs in the industry or profession in which you're interested?

seeking is one context in which business and professional excellence is critical to your success (see Photo 1.2).

Getting to Know Your Diverse Workplace

Once you've landed the job, you'll enter a diverse workplace context. You will no doubt have coworkers who have views of the world and ways of living that are different from yours. Further, it can take time to learn the organizational culture in terms of your role and how you fit in. As Chapter 3 explores, getting to know the diverse workplace goes beyond new employee orientation. The diverse work-

place context requires professional excellence that's fostered by careful self-inventory, adjustment, and mutual respect.

Interpersonal Communication

Central to your personal and professional growth in any career are the relationships and overall rapport you'll have with your boss, coworkers, and clients. Chapter 4 reviews the importance of **interpersonal communication** in common business and professional encounters. While interpersonal communication (also referred to as your people skills) helps you build relationships in your personal and professional life, it's critical to be aware of the challenges that these skills can help you survive (e.g., conflict, difficult coworkers and clients).

Team Communication

Another common experience for professionals across industries is working in a team context. You've probably heard other people use terms such as team player, team skills, and team building in reference to job performance. Working in a team context can be both a rewarding and exhausting experience for any professional. Chapter 5 pays specific attention to the team context that you'll likely encounter in your professional life, as well as strategies that foster professional excellence regarding team communication.

Communication and Technology

Technology in business and professional contexts is central to communication, planning, marketing, networking, organization, research, and the like. Technology allows you to communicate faster than in years past with the use of e-mail, personal digital assistants, and a host of other devices designed to make the exchange of information in business instant rather than delayed. Chapter 6 examines the impact of communication and technology on business and professional contexts. As technology enables you to excel at work with faster information

exchange and interaction, it's important to be aware of the problems and misunderstandings that can occur when technology serves as your primary means of communication.

Written Communication

Chapter 7 examines written communication as it connects to professional excellence. As you enter business and professional contexts that require you to use written communication, it is important for you to make decisions that will ensure professional excellence. Written communication can challenge professionals in a variety of contexts. How do I select the correct format to get the message out? Is it appropriate for me to send this document via e-mail? What tone should I strive for in this message? These are only a few of the questions about written communication that you may encounter in your career.

Leadership

Chapter 8 reviews the role of leadership in business and professional contexts. In order to excel as a leader, you must understand what leadership is and get to know what style of leader you are and if your style works best in the business and professional context in which you're working. Further, this chapter explores the challenges leaders experience, as well as strategies for leading difficult people and managing workplace conflict.

Presentations

As a professional, you will enter situations that require you to give presentations. The presentation context arises in many forms (e.g., informative, persuasive, motivational, and team presentations). Chapters 9, 10, and 11 explore the presentation skills essential to your professional success. When you're presented with an opportunity to give a formal presentation, pitch a product, present research findings, run a meeting, conduct a morning huddle, acknowledge outstanding employees, or motivate your team in difficult times, view that speaking situation as an opportunity to communicate professional excellence.

Work-Life Balance

Chapter 12 looks at how the various experiences in your professional life and personal life can be in tension with one another. This tension can present quite a challenge, which can lead to stress and burnout (see Photo 1.3). We emphasize the importance of work-life balance, explore the triggers that cause imbalance, and present communication strategies that enable you to sustain professional excellence and foster meaningful and successful relationships in your personal life.

Present in each of these contexts is the KEYS process.



Photo 1.3 As much as anyone wants to be successful professionally, it's important to think about personal and family life, too.

KEYS for Workplace Excellence

You will learn to demonstrate professional excellence by using KEYS, a communication process designed to enhance your ability to critically assess and then improve your communication skills. By following the KEYS process, you will learn to utilize your communication strengths and develop your weaknesses, deliver audience-centered messages, understand the communication context, and reflect on your communication with the intention and ability to continually improve.

Effective business and professional communication is central to your success when entering the workplace for the first time, developing your skills at a job you already have, excelling in your career, or managing challenges that may come your way. But you may be wondering, “How can I master this multifaceted, multidimensional skill? How can I make sense of all this information and really make it useful in my career so that I get something practical out of it, something that can enhance my business and professional communication skills and improve my life?” The “how” you are looking for is available to you in this course. Studying communication will enhance your skills as a professional. Doing well in this course will afford you the tools needed for professional excellence. Furthermore, making the KEYS process a part of your communication interactions will continue your development long after this course ends.

What is the KEYS process? The KEYS process (see Figure 1.1) is central to your development as a professional, meaning that we encourage you to personalize it as you continue to expand your understanding of business and professional communication. KEYS is an acronym for **K**now yourself, **E**valuate the professional context, **Y**our communication interaction occurs, and **S**tep back and reflect.

K—Know yourself: means to actively assess our skills as communicators and then develop strategies to utilize our strengths and develop our weaknesses. Accordingly, in the style of the Greek aphorism “Know thyself,” we assert that truly competent communicators are concerned with identifying their weaknesses in order to work on improving them.

E—Evaluate the professional context: entails proactively addressing the needs of our audience and understanding the constraints of the communication situation, as well as developing our skills for communicating with a variety of audiences across situations.

Y—Your communication interaction: requires us to monitor our own verbal and non-verbal cues in addition to the cues of the audience within each communication interaction.

S—Step back and reflect: encourages us to examine the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal messages we convey to others and the overall success of various communication interactions and then take what we’ve learned and start the process again, developing the ability to continually adapt and improve.

The organizing feature of this text is the KEYS process, a process designed to develop critical thinking skills and make you more reflexive communicators with the ability to adapt and continually improve. What we strive for in this book is a balance of theory and practice—an approach that emphasizes skill development based on knowledge and understanding. Review Figure 1.1 to familiarize yourself with the KEYS process. We will use this

Figure 1.1 KEYS to Communication in the Workplace



Know yourself: challenging people to actively assess their skills as communicators and then develop strategies to utilize their strengths and develop their weaknesses



Evaluate the professional context: teaching people to proactively address the needs of their audience and understand the constraints of the professional communication context, as well as developing their skills for communicating with a variety of audiences and contexts



Your communication interaction: asking people to monitor their own verbal and nonverbal cues in addition to the cues of the audience within each communication interaction



Step back and reflect: examining the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal messages we convey to others and the overall success of various communication interactions and then taking what we've learned and starting the process again; developing the ability to continually adapt and improve

feature to personally engage, prepare, and improve human communication in the variety of situations we all have or will encounter in our lives as professionals, regardless of industry.

Defining Communication

As you begin your study, it's important to define what communication means. Communication has been defined in many ways, but here's the definition we prefer: **Human communication** is the process of understanding our experiences and the experiences of others through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages (Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2007; Ivy & Wahl, 2009). People come to understand that communication in everyday experiences is the essential process and skill that helps them make sense of things in both personal and professional contexts.

Even if you have some reservations about your communication skills, you probably consider yourself to be a good communicator and good listener. Most people do. After all, it's difficult to admit being bad at something you do all day, every day for your entire life. Because communication is so much a part of our everyday lives, we think of communication as a simple process. Communicating comes so naturally to us that we rarely feel the need to give communication a second thought. When was the last time you really stopped and examined your communication skills? Do you stop and examine your communication regularly? Most people don't.

In some cases, people who fail to reflect on their communication skills trudge through life thinking that they are great communicators when they are in actuality dreadful communicators. They exemplify a behavior called **communication bravado**—perceiving their communication as effective, while those around them perceive it as ineffective (Quintanilla & Mallard, 2008). Ineffective communicators view communication as simply talking—but truly effective communicators know it is far more complicated than that.

Do you take your communication skills for granted? Are you suffering from communication bravado? Let us assure you that you do indeed have some weaknesses in

your communication and listening, simply because everyone does. However, understanding why communication is important and how the communication process works is the first step in overcoming those weaknesses and starting on the road to professional excellence.

The Importance of Communication

Regardless of your major or the career path you eventually follow, effective communication will be essential to your success in the workplace. Your fellow students understand the value and importance of communication in their careers. Of 116 students surveyed at a southwestern university, 97% agreed that communication is a valuable skill and 88% see themselves using oral presentation skills in their careers (Mallard & Quintanilla, 2007). Further support for the importance of communication in your professional careers comes from business and industry focus groups. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Labor reviewed the results and presented a list of important job skills and communication competencies. Take a moment to review Table 1.1, in which we've summarized the competencies. You'll

Table 1.1 Communication Competencies List (U.S. Department of Labor/Business and Industry)

<i>Personal Effectiveness Competencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone interviews—exhibiting personality and people skills • Personal appearance—professionalism • Must come to work and be on time • One-on-one people skills—social skills must be sharp • Sensitivity to diversity in the workplace • Must pass criminal background check • Integrity is critical • Avoids inappropriate phone calls/text messages at work
<i>Teamwork</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be able to work as a team member • Play well with others • Respect others in the workplace
<i>Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver presentations using appropriate media • Conduct meetings • Interpret nonverbal behaviors to enhance communication • Using politically correct/appropriate language • Share information effectively, small group communication • Be able to deal with the public • Do not use text messaging—type abbreviations in e-mails and conversation • Phone-answering skills
<i>General Skills Desired by Employers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving skills • Writing skills • Being willing to work your way to the top • Communication skills

notice that all the competencies listed in the table are connected to your study of business and professional communication in this course.

Communication: A Complex Process

Communication is a complex process (see Figure 1.2). You see that the communication process consists of a number of elements, all of which are in play every time you communicate. Those who demonstrate professional excellence consider these elements every time they communicate. By the end of this semester, so will you. Let's examine each of these elements in more detail.

Sender and Receiver

We stated above that, practically speaking, communication involves sending and receiving messages; so it should be no surprise that you take on the roles of sender and receiver when you communicate. When you are acting as the sender, you **encode** your messages with verbal and nonverbal cues to help others understand what you mean. When the receivers of your messages respond or **decode** your message, you find out if your message was successfully transferred. In one sense, this exchange of message and response is a cocreation of meaning, in that both parties play a role in cocreating a meaningful

Figure 1.2 Communication Model

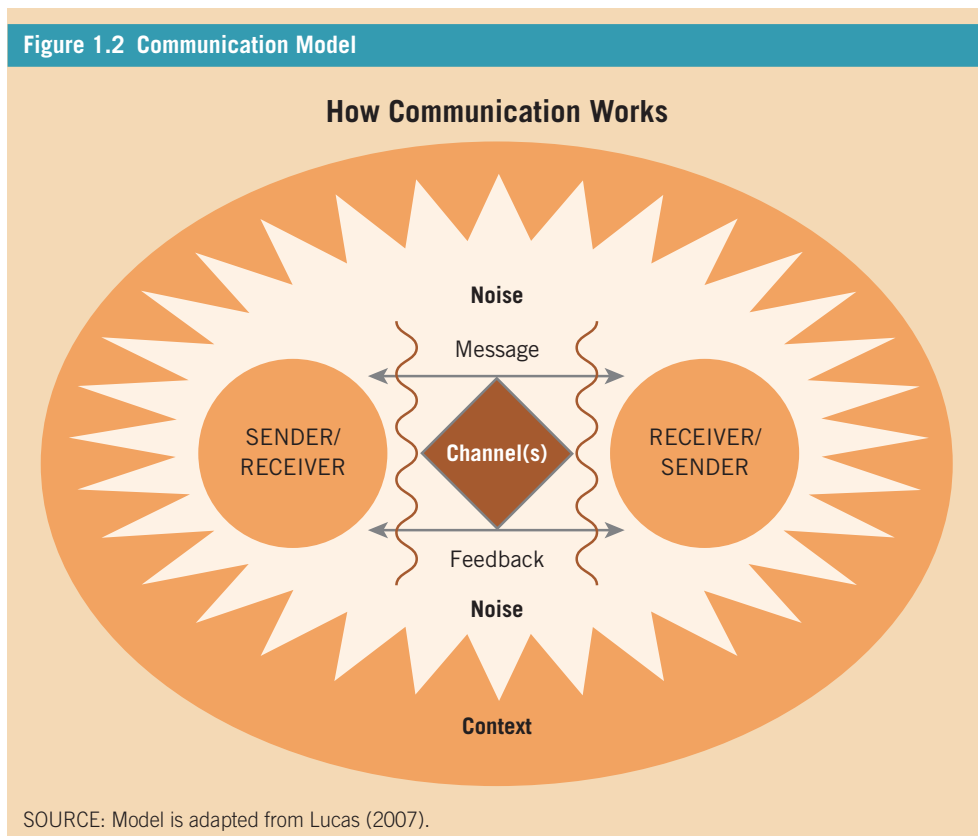




Photo 1.4 Professionals send and receive verbal and nonverbal messages in a variety of contexts.

exchange. While the person initiating the exchange (the **sender**) can't control how the listener (or **receiver**) interprets the message, the goal is for the listener to understand the meaning of the message as the sender intended it.

The respective roles of sender and receiver in communication seem fairly clear-cut, but in truth, communication is experienced in a more holistic manner—not as senders and receivers but as communicators. Consider an example: You run into a friend, Pat, while walking to class. Pat says, “Hey, how’s it going?” You return the greeting and begin to tell Pat about your plans for the weekend (you are attending a cousin’s wedding). At some point during the story you are telling (how your cousin met her fiancé), you notice Pat checking his wristwatch. You cut off your story and say goodbye, and each of you walks to class. In one view of this example, you and Pat switch off as senders and receivers: Pat sends you a greeting, which you receive; you send Pat an explanation of your weekend plans and a story, which Pat receives; then Pat sends you a nonverbal cue that time is short, which you receive by ending the encounter. In another view of this example, you and Pat are both communicators, as you simultaneously send and receive messages (see Photo 1.4).

Message and Feedback

Implicit in the preceding discussion of senders and receivers is that a **message** is communicated. One principle from the field of communication suggests you cannot *not* communicate.

To say that you cannot not communicate is *not* to say that everything is communication. Rather, it means that messages have both a verbal and nonverbal component. In the previous example, Pat did not say anything verbally, but he did send a message nonverbally when he checked his watch. What was his message? That is not clear. He may have been giving a nonverbal cue that your wedding story was too long. He may have had an appointment and he needed to be on his way. Only Pat knows for sure. The point is, regardless of whether he intended to provide a message, Pat did and you responded in accordance with the meaning you took from that message.

Also included in the communication model is **feedback**. In the model, you will see that feedback is sent from the receiver to the sender. However, since the distinction between sender and receiver is in many ways arbitrary, feedback is the same as the message. As communicators, the notion of feedback reminds us to look for cues from the other person or persons with whom we are communicating.

Channel

The **channel** is simply the method by which you send your message. With all the technology available today, deciding which channel to use can be a daunting task. When you advance in your career and move into a leadership position, you'll have to evaluate the merits of various communication channels daily. Given the message, should you meet with members of your team one-on-one or call a meeting? Is it better to send a memo or an e-mail? Should you call or should you text? Each communication channel brings with it a variety of strengths and weaknesses that will be discussed in a later chapter.

Context

Always and everywhere, communication is contextual. **Context** refers to the location, time, and occasion where communication occurs. Developing professional excellence means beginning to assess your communication context and use that information when developing your message. For instance, consider the context of the business and professional communication course. Virtually everyone in the course is there because they have to be. As a result, if you give a speech in this course, your audience may not be interested or knowledgeable about the topic you select; you might need to educate them and take conscious steps to capture their interest. However, if you are giving a speech to a group of employees about their cost of living and merit raises, they will be hanging on your every word.

Noise

Noise is part of the communication context. **Noise** can be either external or internal. **External noise** includes distractions such as audible talking during a meeting, ruffling of papers, or a cell phone going off in the next cubicle. For our purposes, the definition of external noise is extended to include any external factor that could interfere with a communicator's ability to focus on the message. In a meeting, external noise might also include a team member sending text messages with the sound on or whispering while your boss is talking.

Internal noise encompasses any internal condition or state that interferes with the communicator's ability to focus on the message. If your meeting starts at 11:00 a.m., your team members may be looking forward to lunch; if you hold an emergency meeting at 6:00 a.m., your team may be tired. Being tired or hungry creates internal noise.



LISTENING

As a listener with professional excellence, you must work to overcome both internal and external noise.

Developing professional excellence includes learning to consider things such as context and noise when making decisions about your communication interactions. Remember that both internal and external noise are more than just preventing you from focusing on the message. That is, both types of noise can also interfere with your understanding of the message. You can be focused on a message and still not understand.

Principles of Communication

During our discussion of message, we touched on the components of verbal and nonverbal communication. Given the essential role each plays in effective communication and professional excellence, it's important to discuss them each in more detail.

Verbal Communication

What is verbal communication? **Verbal communication** is both our words and our verbal fillers (e.g., um, like). Verbal messages are created through language. Effective communication involves accurate interpretations of others' verbal messages as meaning is cocreated. Otherwise, the meanings of the words you communicate will not be successfully understood. So as a professional, you must make effective use of your language skills and improve your abilities to interpret other people's messages.

The symbols that communicators use are abstract, vague, and sometimes arbitrary. Because symbols can make things a bit off or fuzzy, we have to interpret the meaning. So we construct meanings as we interact with other people and by processing the information in our own heads (Duck, 1994). This process of meaning construction is also symbolic because we use words to think about what things mean (Wood, 2009).

When you really think about it, it is an absolute miracle that we can communicate with one another at all. Really, think about it for a moment. We have selected a bunch of arbitrary symbols we call words and gestures to represent "things." These things can be things we have never seen or things we can never see, such as feelings. Nevertheless, we use those symbols to express our thoughts, desires, and emotions, and somehow communication does occur.

Because of the need for interpretation of meaning, being an audience-centered communicator is a must for professional excellence. Still today, some people believe that communication works like a pipeline (i.e., if you send a message, the target will no doubt be reached). If you said something and another person heard it, then effective communication has occurred. We all should know from experience that this simply is not the way it works. With little effort, you could give a dozen examples of times when you said something and the listener completely misunderstood the message.

Let's look at an example from the retail industry to illustrate the point. A customer comes into a grocery store and asks for green beans. Trying to provide good customer service, a manager explains, "The green beans are on Aisle 8." Twenty minutes later, the customer is still wandering around the store frustrated. Why? Because canned green beans are on Aisle 8, fresh green beans are on Aisle 1, frozen green beans are on Aisle 14, and the prepared green beans she wanted are in the deli across from Aisle 10. "Green beans" is an arbitrary symbol with various interpretations of meaning.

Verbal communication concerns **communication rules**—shared understanding of what communication means and what constitutes appropriate communication given the context. Two kinds of rules guide communication (Pearce, Cronen, & Conklin, 1979). **Regulative rules** describe when, how, where, and with whom to talk about certain things. These same rules also dictate appropriateness. For instance, it might be appropriate for your boss to call you at home after hours. So it's okay for her to call you, but would it be appropriate for you to do the same if you had a concern about your travel schedule? What's appropriate for the person with power or control may not be the same for those serving in a subordinate role. In addition, **constitutive rules** define what communication means by prompting us to count certain kinds of communication. In other words, we learn what counts as paying attention (eye contact), showing affection (kissing, hugging), as well as being inappropriate (interrupting conversations, eye rolling; Duck, 2007; Wood, 2009).

Nonverbal Communication

What is nonverbal communication? Put simply, **nonverbal communication** (also referred to as body language) includes all those ways we communicate without words. A more technical definition is this: Nonverbal communication is “communication other than written or spoken language that creates meaning for someone” (Ivy & Wahl, 2009, p. 3). What kinds of behavior are included in the term nonverbal communication? “Your walk, stance, posture, and footsteps are a form of nonverbal communication. What you wear and how you look, move, and gesture, as well as the facial and eye expressions you make all count as nonverbal communication” (p. 3)

The primary categories or **codes** of nonverbal communication include the following: vocal expression; space, environment, and territory; physical appearance; body movement, gestures, and posture; facial and eye expressions; and touch (see Table 1.2; Ivy & Wahl, 2009).



Table 1.2 Nonverbal Communication Codes: Consider the Professional Context

<i>Nonverbal Code</i>	<i>Consider the Professional Context</i>
Kinesics (body movement, gestures, and posture)	How do you think gestures and body movement impact professional contexts?
Facial/eye behavior	Can you think of some examples of professional face and eye behavior? How can face and eye behavior lead to negative perceptions?
Vocalics (paralanguage)	What vocal qualities do you perceive as professional? Unprofessional?
Space/territory	How can space and territorial violations impact business and professional contexts?
Touch	Can you think of positive ways to use touch in professional contexts? In contrast, can you think of some negative uses of touch?
Environment	What are the qualities of a professional environment?
Physical appearance	In what ways does physical appearance impact business and professional communication?

Vocal Expression

Vocalics, sometimes referred to as paralanguage, refers to how people use their voices to communicate and express themselves (Ivy & Wahl, 2009). Think about the direct impact our **tone of voice** can have in a professional setting. What does your voice say about you to others?

Space

The impact of space on communication is called **proxemics**, or how people create and use space and distance, as well as how they behave to protect and defend that space (Hall, 1959, 1966; Ivy & Wahl, 2009). Violations of territory and our personal space can be detrimental in business and professional settings.

Environment

The constructed or natural surroundings that influence your communicative decisions, attitude, and mood are termed **environment** (Ivy & Wahl, 2009). Take a moment to think about what preferences would be related to your work environment. How does the environment (e.g., temperature, lighting, color, furniture) impact your communication?

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance—“the way our bodies and overall appearance nonverbally communicate to others and impact our view of ourselves in everyday life” (Ivy & Wahl, 2009, p. 129)—also plays an important role in communication. Clothing is a part of our physical appearance that is often critical to professional situations. Clothing helps you convey a sense of professionalism. Clothing and other appearance aspects, termed **artifacts** (e.g., jewelry, tattoos, piercings, makeup, cologne, eyeglasses), send nonverbal messages and help others form perceptions of us, both good and bad (Roach, 1997). The nonverbal message sent by your clothing is a powerful part of professional excellence.



Body Movement

Kinesics is a general term for the study of human movement, gestures, and posture (Birdwhistell, 1960; Ivy & Wahl, 2009). Kinesics provides valuable information about a person to others. Have you ever heard someone make reference to how a certain person carries himself or herself? Have you ever talked about a person who has a certain presence in the room? Perhaps some of us have said, “He/she walks like a leader.” Some people carry themselves in ways that convey pride and confidence, while others have poor posture and seem to lack confidence.

Facial Behavior

Facial expressions (including the study of eye behavior, called **oculesics**) are also critical codes that have been studied by nonverbal communication scholars (Ivy & Wahl, 2009). What does another person’s face tell you about him or her? What emotion is she expressing? How is he feeling? Are your coworkers surprised to see you? Did your colleagues find your presentation to be entertaining, or were they disappointed? Your face and eye behavior play a huge role in the messages you send in business and professional contexts.

Touch

Touch, also called **haptics** in non-verbal research, “is the most powerful form of nonverbal communication; it’s also the most misunderstood and carries the potential for the most problems if ill used” (Ivy & Wahl, 2009, p. 45). The essence of greeting rituals in business situations is the **professional handshake** (Hlemstra, 1999). The handshake is critical to making a good first impression as a professional (see Photo 1.5). Think about what you look for in a handshake. What does a professional handshake feel like?



Photo 1.5 The handshake is an important example of nonverbal communication experienced in many business and professional situations.

Communication Apprehension

Effective communication skills are essential if you want to excel in leadership. Put simply, to move up the ladder of success, you must develop your communication skills. Unfortunately, communication apprehension is a very real problem that stops many talented individuals from achieving professional excellence. What is communication apprehension? (See Photo 1.6.)



Photo 1.6 Would this sight cause you to feel communication apprehension?

Types of Communication Apprehension

According to James C. McCroskey (1982), one of the leading researchers in the communication discipline, **communication apprehension** is “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 137). You can understand your own communication apprehension by thinking about your communication in particular situations. What types of communication situation increase your apprehension? According to McCroskey (1984), there are at least four types of communication apprehension. The different types of communication apprehension are listed below:

1. **Trait communication apprehension** means that one possesses a “shy trait.” In general, shy people tend to not raise their hands in class a lot, avoid certain social situations, and feel extremely anxious about giving a professional presentation.
2. **Context-based communication apprehension** describes a fear of communicating in certain contexts. A fear of public speaking is a great example of context communication apprehension. For example, a student may not be nervous about meeting new people or participating in small groups, but presenting a speech in front of the class promotes a high degree of apprehension.
3. **Audience-based communication apprehension** explains a person’s fear of speaking to certain people or groups. For example, a person may feel comfortable speaking in front of friends in his or her social circle, but speaking in front of colleagues at work makes him or her extremely nervous.
4. **Situational communication apprehension** refers to apprehension to communication in specific sets of circumstances; everyone at some point in their lives is going to feel apprehensive about communicating something. Think of a person you might want to impress, such as a boss or an interviewer. In general, you are an outgoing person and don’t mind presenting in front of people, but the presence of someone you want to impress may promote an uneasy or anxious feeling.

Causes of Communication Apprehension

Now that we’ve reviewed the different types of communication apprehension, let’s take a look at some of the causes. Communication scholar Michael Beatty (1988) lists eight causes for communication apprehension. Review the list that follows to see if any of the causes resonate with you personally.

1. **Novelty:** If the type of communication situation, such as giving a speech or running a meeting, is not something that you do every day, it can create apprehension until you become familiar with this task or situation.
2. **Formality:** Preparing and organizing something to be in the spotlight can promote the feeling of formality that makes you nervous or apprehensive.

3. **Subordinate status:** If someone in charge of you, such as a manager at work, is evaluating your presentation, his or her higher status and evaluation can cause anxiety.
4. **Peer evaluation:** How are my coworkers going to respond to me? This question hits some concerns you may have about your peers evaluating you. These concerns can in turn cause apprehension.
5. **Dissimilarity:** Sometimes you may feel different from the audience. Having nothing in common with the audience causes anxiety.
6. **Conspicuousness:** Feeling as though you are in the spotlight and all eyes are on you can certainly cause anxiety.
7. **Lack of attention:** When you feel as though a listener or the audience is bored and uninterested in your message or presentation, you may begin to feel apprehension.
8. **Prior history:** Many people have had a bad experience during a communication interaction, such as an interview, a presentation, or a meeting. This negative experience can create anxiety the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.

As you can see, there are many different types and causes of communication apprehension. Identifying the types and causes of your communication apprehension is important but not nearly as important as learning the skills that will reduce those fears.

Communication Ethics

With professional excellence as our goal, we believe that ethical behavior must serve as a foundation for people to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Central to professional excellence is communication ethics. **Ethics** is the general term for the discussion, determination, and deliberation processes that attempt to decide what is right or wrong, what others should or should not do, and what is considered appropriate in our individual, communal, and professional lives (Japp, Meister, & Japp, 2005; Johannesen, Valde, & Whedbee, 2008). What considerations or factors help shape our ethical decisions as professionals? **Ethical considerations** are the variety of factors important for us to consider in any scenario in which we're making a decision, conducting an evaluation, or making a selection (Bok, 1989, 1999; Carter, 1996; Japp, Meister, & Japp, 2005; Tannen, 1998). Ethical considerations vary from person to person, and it is not always as simple as the black-and-white world of right and wrong. For example, you may experience **ethical dilemmas**, situations that do not seem to present clear choices between right and wrong or good and evil. If you are asked to do something illegal, then it may be easy to make a decision. "No, I will not do something illegal." But what if it is not illegal? What if everyone else does it? What if it is just bending the rules a little bit? The following are five questions we believe you should always consider as an ethical communicator.



Ethical Considerations

Communication ethics is central to the KEYS process that you will apply to professional contexts. When it comes to both your written and your verbal communication, always make certain that your answer to the questions below is “yes.”

Lying: Are you telling the truth?

Secrets: Are you respecting the boundary placed around information by avoiding disclosure to others?

Integrity: Are you discerning right from wrong and explaining your reasoning for your decision? In other words, are you vocal about the ethics driving your decision (e.g., care and love, financial, respect for individual rights, equality for all)?

Aggressive communication: Are you communicating with others void of power abuse and aggression? Are you communicating with others in a dignified and respectful manner? Are you communicating with mutual respect and open dialogue?

Plagiarism (cheating): Are you communicating information that is authentic and not plagiarized? Is the source of information being credited appropriately?

Think about how the ethical considerations above are important in various business and professional contexts.




Photo 1.7 Something as common as office gossip can be connected to ethics. Do you think gossip can stand in the way of business and professional excellence?

Many ethical considerations are connected to our values and virtues (see Photo 1.7). **Values** are moral principles or rules that determine ethical behaviors. Values are often articulated in should or should-not statements. Sometimes values are presented as statements of what a group believes or as lists of rules people intend to honor. Many readers of this text will take jobs in industries that ask all employees to support **organizational values**, specific principles or guidelines such as safety, teamwork, integrity, or ownership that are typically outlined in support of any given organizational mission or goal. For example, health care systems usually connect employees to organizational values that foster

a high-quality patient and family experience. Regardless of industry, organizational values address both the experience of the people working for the company and the experience of customers with service and product quality. To minimize ethical dilemmas in your professional career, seek employment with organizations that share your values.

Once you've been promoted or elected into a particular position of leadership, you may think that's it—job over; I've arrived. We emphasize that leadership is a skill, one that needs to be developed and maintained throughout life. Think about the qualities of excellent leaders. Ethics should be among those qualities. And like all other leadership skills, your ethics must be developed and continually maintained. While not every reader of this book is currently in a leadership position, has the goal of becoming a CEO, or even has the goal of becoming a leader, the KEYS process with communication ethics at the foundation drives excellence in professional situations.



Each chapter in this book will connect the topic to ethical communication, because it's the foundation of business and professional excellence.

Summary

In this chapter, we reviewed fundamental information to begin our study of business and professional communication. We defined human communication, including verbal and nonverbal, and then provided a practical communication model. We defined professional excellence: being recognized for your skills as a communicator, serving as a role model to those around you, recognizing your strengths and developing your weaknesses, being audience centered, understanding the context, and possessing the ability to adapt and continually improve.

Next, we situated our topic of study within the workplace as a communication context and discussed communication apprehension as a common obstacle for professionals. We introduced the KEYS process as a way for professionals to develop their communication. **Know yourself** means to actively assess our skills as communicators and then develop strategies to utilize our strengths and develop our weaknesses. **Evaluate the professional context** entails proactively addressing the needs of our audience and understanding the constraints of the communication situation, as well as developing our skills for communicating with a variety of audiences and situations. **Your communication interaction** requires us to monitor our own verbal and nonverbal cues in addition to the cues of the audience within each communication interaction. **Step back and reflect** encourages us to examine the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal messages we convey to others and the overall success of various communication interactions and then take what we've learned and start the process again, developing the ability to continually adapt and improve.

This introductory chapter has provided you with an understanding of some of the basic terminology and the importance of communication excellence. In the second chapter, we explore some of the most important skills needed to enter the workplace, or put simply, how to land a job using the KEYS process.

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- K**now Yourself
 - E**valuate the Professional Context
 - Y**our Communication Interaction
 - S**tep Back and Reflect

Discussion Questions

1. What are the contexts for business and professional excellence?
2. Why is it important to study communication?
3. What are the principles of nonverbal communication? Discuss at least two nonverbal communication codes. Which codes discussed in this chapter are the most important to you as a professional?
4. Discuss the KEYS process introduced in this chapter. What are the four KEYS features?
5. Work through a personal example—either something you encountered in the past or are presently experiencing—to help you make sense of the KEYS process. Does it help you get more familiar with the situation? Are there changes you need to make considering this particular situation?

Terms to Remember

Artifacts: items such as jewelry, tattoos, piercings, makeup, cologne, and eyeglasses that send nonverbal messages

Channel: the means by which messages are sent

Codes: primary categories of nonverbal communication

Communication: the process of acting on information

Communication apprehension: an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons

Communication bravado: having a positive view of one's communication when in reality it is actually bad, leading to conflict and hurt feelings in others

Communication rules: shared understanding of what communication means and what constitutes appropriate communication given the context

Constitutive rules: define what communication means by prompting us to count certain kinds of communication

Context: the location, space, and occasion where communication occurs

Decode: when we make meaning out of verbal and nonverbal cues others send

Encode: use of verbal and nonverbal cues to help others understand what we mean

Environment: the constructed or natural surroundings that influence your communicative decisions, attitude, and mood

Ethics: the discussion, determination, and deliberation processes that attempt to decide what is right or wrong, what others should or should not do, and what is considered appropriate in our individual, communal, and professional lives

Ethical considerations: the variety of factors important for us to consider in any scenario in which we're making a decision, conducting an evaluation, or making a selection

Ethical dilemmas: situations that do not seem to present clear choices between right and wrong or good and evil

External noise: outside distractions that interfere with the message

Feedback: information or messages communicated between sender and receiver

Haptics: the study of touch and human contact

Human communication: the process of making sense of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages

Internal noise: internal conditions or distractions that interfere with the message

Interpersonal communication: the cocreation of meaning as people interact

Kinesics: the study of human movement, gestures, and posture

Message: the information or feedback that is communicated

Noise: external or internal disruption to the context

Nonverbal communication: communication other than written or spoken language that creates meaning for someone

Oculesics: the study of eye behavior

Organizational values: specific principles or guidelines such as safety, teamwork, integrity, or ownership that are typically outlined in support of any given organizational mission or goal

Physical appearance: the way our bodies and overall appearance communicate to others and impact our view of ourselves in personal and professional life

Professional excellence: being recognized for your skills as a communicator, serving as a role model to those around you, recognizing your strengths and developing your weaknesses, being audience centered, understanding the context, and possessing the ability to adapt and continually improve

Professional handshake: the essence of nonverbal communication in business situations that helps make a good first impression

Proxemics: how humans (and animals) create and use space and distance, as well as how they behave to protect and defend that space

Receiver: the listener who interprets the message

Regulative rules: describe when, how, where, and with whom to talk about certain things

Sender: person initiating the exchange

Tone of voice: nontechnical term for all the elements that the human voice can produce and manipulate

Values: moral principles or rules that determine ethical behaviors

Verbal communication: the words we choose to use that are vocalized to convey meaning to others

Vocalics: the study of how people express themselves through their voices

Ancillaries

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