

ENCODING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Nothing seems more important for an extension worker to be effective and successful at his/her work than to have sufficient command of basic communication skills i.e. speaking, writing, listening and reading. These skills are the tools of the extension worker without which he/she cannot function properly. Communication skills affect your ability to understand others, to establish relationships, and to perform in most situations. The ability to communicate skilfully, therefore, directly affects your business success. Thus as extension workers we need to improve our communication skills to be successful at our work. Rowson (2005) argues that improving your communication skills can bring huge rewards; it can help you to win more contracts and sales, gain promotion, manage your organization or your team more effectively, find friendship. It can enhance relationship both at work and at home. In short communicating is at the heart of all good management. These skills can easily be improved by paying little attention to them. This chapter specifically deals with the development of encoding communication skills (speaking and writing) essentially needed for effective extension work. Encoding basically refers to a mechanism in which the communication source selects some suitable codes to convey his/her message to the intended receiver. In this way being an essential function of the source it plays an important role in communication effectiveness.

6.1 Preparing and Delivering a Speech

One of the most important communication skills commonly used by extension workers is speech that is delivering a message through word of mouth. As extension workers we need to remember that people are generally more interested in and motivated to learn about matters that are physically and psychologically near to them. People are likely to accept a message more readily if it coincides with their preconceptions,

development

prejudices or prior beliefs. Thus these aspects need to be given due consideration while preparing a speech (Calvert, 1990). Similarly as speakers we need to use varied styles because a soft monotone speech often leaves the impression that the speaker is uncertain or unprepared (Ibid). It has also been observed that good speakers use gestures and facial expressions to create a bond with their listeners (Lucas, 2001). Success in public speaking depends on two factors: confidence and competence - both can be improved through practice. In order to be effective speakers, the extension workers need to remember the following guidelines for preparing and delivering a speech.

6.1.1 Preparing a speech

- Effectiveness of a speech largely depends upon the efforts made by the speaker on its preparation. While preparing a speech always keep in view your intended listeners. Avoid including any thing which is contrary to their prior beliefs.
- Remember that a good speech is a combination of what you say and how you say it.
- Keep in view the needs and interests of the intended listeners. As a matter of fact successful communication requires a high level of attention on the part of the listeners. They will pay attention only to that message, which is based on their real needs and interests. So a good speaker always selects the most appropriate contents for the speech.
- Always keep in view the mental and educational levels of the intended listeners. All farmers cannot be treated at equal level with regard to their mental capabilities. The choice of codes, words, language etc, must be made accordingly. If the instructions are above their mental level, they will not follow, and if these are below their mental level, they will lose interest.
- Have a specific purpose in your mind while preparing a speech. Your focus should always be on the intended purpose. Your purpose sometimes may be simply to inform

farmers about something new or you may want to convince them or stimulate action. Each of these purposes demand different strategies,

- Collect all the relevant material keeping in view the specific needs and the intended purpose. Try to include evidence, facts and figures to make the speech more impressive and persuasive. A persuasive speech is more effective than that, which is not supported with sound evidence. Also try to include possible and suitable persuasive appeals. Sometimes emotional appeals are more effective than factual ones. Similarly sometimes fear appeals seem more appropriate than others to serve the intended purpose. It depends on the message and the audience.
- Make the speech comprehensive. A speech should be like a woman's skirt: long enough to cover the topic yet short enough to be interesting (Winston Churchill).
- Organise your thoughts in a logical sequence. A message is more likely to be accepted by the audience if it makes sense to them. People generally tend to avoid unsystematic material because it does not make any sense. Logical sequence means to say something at a time when it is expected by the intended listeners. For this purpose write down the presentation in rough. Review this first draft. You may find things which are irrelevant, unclear, or difficult to explain. It is better to leave them unsaid.
- Audience would tend to remember the earliest and latest items in a series better than those in the middle. It implies that the important information must be included in the opening and the concluding remarks.
- The initial few seconds of a speech are very important. Try to grab the audience's attention at the beginning. You may ask a question or make a startling statement of fact or use a quotation or tell a humorous incident depending upon the situation. Divide your speech into a few main headings or points. Don't include too much material to be remembered by the listeners.

- Make a good conclusion of the speech. Don't leave anyone with any doubt what you have said. The end of the speech must include the central idea and the main points as a take home message. You may end with an appeal for action or you may want the audience to think about the solution to a problem.
- Rehearse your presentation prior to actual presentation. That will help in confidence building. As we practice, we get better at an activity and therefore feel more confident.

6.1.2 Delivering a speech

Effective speech delivery can be regarded as a function of the most appropriate and balanced use of both verbal and non-verbal expressions to get your message through to the intended audiences. Even a well-thought out and well-prepared speech may be fruitless if it is not delivered skilfully and competently. In other words what you say is as important as how you say it. Lucas (2001) argues that there is a great deal of research to show that a speaker's credibility is strongly affected by his or her delivery. The following points may serve as a guideline for extension workers in delivering their messages effectively:

- The first and the foremost basic essential for effective delivery is perhaps the self-confidence. Be confident and be relaxed. A little fear or nervousness is just but natural. However, too much will have adverse effects on the delivery. You will feel confident if you know what you are going to discuss. Try to develop positive attitudes toward your topic and your audience. Through experience and practice you will gain self-confidence.
- In the beginning greet the audience and tell them what you are going to say. As a speaker one must realize that first impression is very important. Lucas (2001) argues that the hardest part of any presentation is the beginning. Rowson (2005) says that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. The first impression you make can also be a lasting impression. Therefore, you need to make sure you get that first impression right. Start off well, the rest will

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automatically become easier. It is always wise to begin speaking slowly in a low pitch.

- You only need to make two or three main points to make your speech successful. Note down the main points of the speech (cue cards) and keep them in front of you. This will help you in releasing a lot of mental pressure of remembering what you want to say next. It will also minimise the chance of missing something important. It also facilitates in confidence building. It is unwise to have with you the whole text. You may face difficulty in locating the point you want to explain. It is always better to prepare cue cards with key words on them. These cue cards should be properly marked. Never read from the script.
- Be courteous to your listeners. They will readily accept a message if they like the speaker. Always use a pleasing tone, simple language, and soft voice.
- A good speaker has a range and flexibility of pitch. Pitch is the highness or lowness of the speaker's voice. Lucas (2001) argues that in speech, pitch can affect the meanings of words or sound. These are the changes in pitch, which reveal whether you are asking question or making a statement. In ordinary conversation we instinctively change the pitch to convey meanings and emotions. Those who do not do so are said to speak in a monotone. Using a monotonous tone would be boring for the listeners. A skilful speaker knows where to keep the pitch low and where it needs to be high to emphasise a certain point. A pitch variety makes a speech impressive and keeps the audience alert and active.
- Speaker's voice has been regarded as a primary factor in delivery. To use voice affectively, the speaker should control volume, pitch, rate, pauses, vocal variety, pronunciation, articulation, and dialect (Lucas, 2001). Your voice must be loud enough to be heard properly. Too much loudness may be annoying and too low voice may also cause disturbance and confusion. There should be a balance keeping in view the mood of the audience,

material being discussed and the occasion. You may make adjustments in your voice according to the size of the audience. Pitch your presentation towards the back of the audience. Remember, your listeners get only one chance to absorb a spoken message. So give emphasis on articulation. Utter words clearly and distinctly. Use your teeth, tongue and lips together to enunciate words. In effective delivery your throat and neck muscles should be relaxed. Your lips, tongue and jaw, however, should be mobile and active in shaping each puff of air or syllable clearly and distinctly. A good speaker has a good sense of articulation. Be very careful while using words with similar sounds.

- While delivering a speech use body language to reinforce your oral presentation. Your facial expressions and movement of body parts if used in the right manner at the right time can have a considerable impact on the speech delivery. They should be consistent with the oral presentation. Avoid contradictory expressions. Try to be very natural in using non-verbal expressions. As regards appropriate timing, a gesture should come with, or slightly before the oral presentation it is intended to support. Make your gestures strong enough to make an impact. They can rouse a sleepy audience and make them active listeners.
- Try to keep the audience with you. Be sure that the listeners are taking interest in the speech. If you can relate the topic to your listeners, they are likely to be much more interested in the speech. It is because people pay attention to message that affects them directly. You may ask questions just to keep them active and alert.
- Deliberately pause at key points. This will indicate the importance of the point which you are explaining.
- Be alert to the audience's reaction and react accordingly. Look them in the eye when you have made a good point and try to get them to nod.
- Try to keep an eye contact with the listeners. Look at them, not at the ceiling, the floor or outside the room. Also look

around the entire group. Don't fix on an individual or talk to just a few people or one side of the group.

- Be sure that you are talking to and with them not at them. It makes your listeners feel that you are sharing information and feelings with them. This will also make them realise that you are not forcing yourself and imposing something on them.
- Avoid moving too much while delivering the speech.
- You may use audio visual aids relating to the speech if the situation demands. This will make your speech delivery more interesting and effective. The aids, when used well, make a speaker's message clearer and easier to retain. Using a live object as a visual aid can even have a dramatic impact. The aids help in stimulating the sensory organs (ears and eyes) and facilitate quick comprehension of the message by the audience.
- Use humour if it suits the occasion to keep the listeners fresh and active. As communicators we need to remember that all messages are not suitable for all situations. Communication that would be permitted at a graduation party may not be considered appropriate in a hospital.
- Don't be too fast or too slow in delivering a speech. Give adequate pause to your listeners to grasp your ideas. However, too much pause would have negative effects on speech delivery and can reduce speaker's credibility. A balance must be maintained keeping in view the level of the audience and nature of subject being discussed. Learning how and when to pause is one of the major challenges for most speakers. Lucas (2001) maintains that developing a keen sense of timing (pausing) is a matter of common sense, and partly a matter of experience. Average speed of delivery is about 150 words per minute in English language (Calvert, 1990). However, it may vary with other languages. Lucas (2001) argues that there is no uniform rate for effective speech making. The best rate of speech depends on several things - the vocal attributes of the speaker, the mood the speaker is trying to create, the

composition of the audience, and the nature of the occasion.

- Always respect your listeners. Encourage their participation. Appreciate them if they make any important point relating to the speech.
- Be ready for criticism, there is always a diversity of opinions, judgements, and reactions. Some may approve your argument while others may disapprove it.
- Recognize that communication is both intellectual and emotional.
- At the end of the speech don't forget to pay sincere thanks to the listeners for their patient listening and for being with you throughout the speech. Don't forget to ask if there are any questions.
- Above all you need to remember that if your audience walk away with something valuable after listening to you, your speech can be regarded as successful.