

# Getting from Ordinary to Extraordinary — The When, Where, How and Why to Improving the Way You Communicate!

By Judith Filek—President  
Impact Communications, Inc.

People who are extraordinary communicators don't start out that way. They work at getting better. They take communicating effectively seriously. They practice. They learn the *When, Where, How and Why* to improving the way they communicate.

**When:** People who are fabulous communicators do what Tiger Woods does – they work at perfecting their core communication game on a **daily** basis. They are always practicing or modifying some skill. They never say “I am good enough.”

**Where:** Great communicators use every opportunity to practice their communication skills. They practice first in low stakes situations, like in meetings, trade shows, “lunch and learns,” or conversations with one's peers. They also practice off the job- in restaurants, at parties, at weddings or around the kitchen table. They don't wait for formal presentations. By the time a high stakes presentation comes up, they feel ready because they have been practicing all along.

**How:** First, serious learners get feedback, either from a communication's coach, their manager, or their peers. Some join organizations, like *Toastmasters* or take a communications skills class with the express purpose of understanding what they do well and what needs improvement. Once they understand their strengths and weaknesses, they set realistic goals. Then, they tackle one skill at a time until it becomes second nature for them. They do not try to correct everything at once.

Maxwell Maltz says it takes 21 days to change a habit. A lot of what we do when communicating is based on habit. Since some habits negatively affect people's per-

ception of a speaker's credibility, it is important to change those things that undercut one's impact and to work on improvement on a daily, even hourly basis, for 21 days or longer.

To be perceived as a powerful business communicator, a speaker must demonstrate both composure and energy. The skills for composure are:

- Posture
- Eye Contact
- Pausing

The skills for energy are:

- Movement
- Gestures
- Vocal Variety
- Facial Animation

To practice the composure skill of *posture*, notice your posture whenever you see yourself in a mirror. If one shoulder is higher than another, you are not balancing your weight. Also, notice your arms when at rest. Do they rest at your sides, in your pockets or on your hips? Are they crossed on your chest? The goal with posture is to look confident, but also approachable. Each time you walk in front of a mirror or see your reflection in a window, correct your posture until you feel people will see you in a positive light. This is the first way you communicate with your audience.

*Eye contact* is easy to practice since you can do it anywhere. The thing to remem-

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ber is that you want the eye contact to be sustained, not fleeting. You want people to feel you are talking just to them so practice by looking at an individual for a full sentence or thought. Do not try to include everyone at once by giving people a quick glance.

You can keep tabs on how you are *pausing* through your own voice mail system. Play back messages before you send them. Listen for non-words, speed and diction. Pay attention to how clearly and concisely you stated your message.

When you present an idea to people, their expectation is that you truly believe in it and are excited to share what you know. To convey enthusiasm, it is important that a speaker gesture to emphasize ideas and help listeners to “see” it. If the speaker has the opportunity to stand up, movement sends an additional message as to how important the idea is. When a speaker is moving and gesturing, he becomes real and demonstrates conviction. Moreover, when the speaker is gesturing and moving, the face lights up and the voice has a certain sparkle. The best way for speakers to get feedback on the energy skills is by periodically videotaping themselves and noticing what they observe when reviewing the tape. Are the gestures repetitive, overdone, or too controlled? Does the movement seem purposeful and tied to a pair of eyes? Is the voice interesting or flat?

**Why:** The answer to why one should get better at communicating is simple. It is the number one skill for business people today. It is essential for anyone who wants to move up the corporate ladder. To be considered a good leader, one must be able to communicate effectively with senior level managers, one’s peers and one’s direct reports. Without clearly communicating the message, projects get scuttled, opportunities are overlooked and wrong decisions are made, costing the company market shares and profits. With “ordinary” communication skills, one’s career stagnates.

To join the ranks of extraordinary communicators, be a continuous learner. Dedicate yourself to perfection. Pay attention to many opportunities you have for growth.

**Question:** *We’re interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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