



Lesson 11: Communication Skills Development

S.M.A.R.T. Talk Technology

Up until now, the P~P~S Success Mastery Program has focused primarily on the I phase of development. With Lesson 11, we begin to explore the WE phase of development. By now, you've charted out your legacy, begun to manage your self physically, emotionally and spiritually, and started to carefully aligned your professional and financial decisions with the overarching goal of your legacy. With that foundation in place, now is the time to start thinking about how other people fit into your life and how you fit into theirs. The basis for any relationship begins with open and honest communication and it is with this topic that we begin the WE phase of the program.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand and use S.M.A.R.T. talk technology.
2. Recognize common obstructions to effective communications.
3. Explore communications through the camel, lion, and child model of human development.

S.M.A.R.T. Talk

What is S.M.A.R.T. talk? S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym that I developed to help me to remember how to better communicate. As you will find, effective communication is generally not something that we're taught as children and adults and it's very hard to master. By the time most of us have an interest in learning to communicate better, we find that we're very heavily programmed by our upbringing and our culture, both of which tend to be imbued with ineffective communication techniques.



So this new technique is designed to help the user overcome all of the bad communication habits that our upbringing might have instilled in us. S.M.A.R.T. stands for:

1. Specific
2. Motive
3. Adapt
4. Repeat/feedback
5. Time out!

We'll go through each of these individually during the course of the lesson and I'll explain how to make use of these techniques in your life.

Applying S.M.A.R.T. Talk Technologies



Specificity

The more specific we are in our communications, the less likely errors of misunderstanding are to be a factor. In the photo to the left, you'll see two construction workers following a blueprint to construct some building. A blueprint is a form of specific communication. Imagine what would happen if a construction team had to build a structure without a blueprint. They'd have all sorts of question to answer: how deep should the foundation be? What grade of rebar should we use in the cement? What quality of cement should we use? The order of the construction, the materials used, the dimensions of the building would all

be left up in the air and this just isn't an effective way to get the building constructed. It's also a not a great way to ensure that the client gets the building that he wanted.

Communication in general is just like a blueprint. When you initiate a conversation you probably have something you want to convey. If you really want to get your point across to your listener, you'll need to be specific.



In some instances, you may need to be overly specific. If you don't care what kind of organic eggs your partner brings back from the store, then you probably don't need to say anything more than, "could you bring back some organic eggs from the store?" On the other hand, if you are instructing your employees about a new product and their roles in the production of that product you may want to be extremely specific so that the product isn't damaged or to make sure that it is produced in a timely manner.

Now failure to be specific enough can get us in real trouble. One kind of failure of specificity that can cause difficulty in our communication is *exaggeration*. So for example, imagine that the foreman in our construction example directs a worker to bring the cement to a certain location. If the worker discovers that there isn't enough cement to complete the job and reports that "we're out of cement," he's exaggerated in a way that could cause real problems, especially if the foreman over-orders his supplies on the basis of the worker's exaggeration.

Perhaps a more familiar example might be seen in the following case. An employee might have been late to work twice in the last six months, and an angry manager, upon seeing the employee arriving late, might accuse him of being late "all the time." The manager is failing to be specific. If the manager were specific, she'd note that her employee had been late twice in the last six months, creating the proper perspective for an honest, effective communication. Notice as well that "you're late all the time" is a judgment, whereas "you've been late twice in the past six months," is closer to an observation. A conversation initiated with observation is far more likely to result in an acceptable outcome for both parties involved because they are far less likely to trigger a defensive reaction. Both employer and employee are much more likely to work their way through the difficulty rationally, without the emotional roadblocks triggered by an accusation. Parents can also benefit from the specificity requirement for the same reason. Children are much more likely to respond to a parent's communication if it isn't delivered in the form of an accusation.

Downplaying is another kind of failure of specificity. In some ways, downplaying is the opposite of exaggeration – purposefully *de-emphasizing* the importance of something.



Often people will downplay because there is an ulterior motive in their communication. Perhaps you've borrowed someone's car and had an accident with it and you downplay the damage, because you're worried about the owner's reaction when they discover that their car has been damaged.

Guessing is yet another way that a communication may fail the specificity criteria. Basing your communications on a recognized lack of information is a great way to invite misunderstanding. If you are guessing, then state, "well I guess..." at least that way, your listener knows that you aren't asserting your statement as fact and they can adjust their behavior accordingly. Stating a guess as a fact can cause all sorts of difficulties. If an employer said, "you've been late eight times this month," without knowing that this was true, they can create emotional barriers to resolving the tardiness issue. This is especially the case if the guess is wrong. If the employee had only been late once, in all likelihood the guess stated as fact is going to create real anger.

Specificity is also crucial when you are experiencing or describing an *emotion*. If you are angry with someone and say "I'm really pissed off at you!" you haven't told them what they've done, how to help resolve the anger or how to prevent you from getting angry in the future. The statement also opens the door for assumptions or guessing about you and what their response to your statement should be. That means you've opened the door for further failures of specificity. On the other hand, if you were more specific about your emotions, you might say,

"I feel disappointed that you showed up late two times in the last six months and I'd really appreciate it if you could help me find a solution so that this doesn't happen again. We're running a business and it's very important for all of us to work together as a team for the most positive and beneficial outcome for the business and its customers."

Notice that there's a huge difference between this way of expressing yourself and the initial "I'm pissed off!" The last expression is much less emotionally charged. While the employer expresses his disappointment, it's much less violent. The employer also



explains why she is disappointed and requests help in resolving the solution. It invites discussion rather than more emotional responses.

Finally, basing your communications on *assumptions* is another way that we can fail to be specific. I'm sure you've heard the old saying, "If you assume, you make an ass out of you and me." When we make assumptions, we make guesses without checking to see that those guess are true. Many times our assumptions may be based on emotion, rather than on any more objective facts and this can create unfortunate conflicts or tensions. As with guessing, if you're going to base your communication on an assumption, it's best to start your sentence with "I assume that..." so that your listener understands some of the circumstances behind your claim. Again, this allows them to react more accurately to your sentence.

Now specificity can solve all of these problems, but it is possible to be *too* specific. The best way to communicate is to offer all and only the information needed in order to elicit the desired response in the listener. Too much specificity can make your listener feel as though you're nitpicking or condescending and can trigger an emotional response. The essence of specificity, especially when there is a possibility of an emotional response to your utterances, is to give the person the right amount of information to understand what you're saying, why you're saying it, and the intention behind your sentence, without provoking a negative emotional response.

Motive

Have or identify your motive when you're communicating with someone. What effects do you want to produce by saying what you are saying? I recently read an article that contained a surprising statistic. The article showed that 90% of terminally ill heart patients who were told that they would die within six months if they did not change their diet and lifestyle, found it easier to die than to change their diet and lifestyle. What this tells you is that the physicians were unable to identify their motive to communicate or instill change. They couldn't identify what would motivate a change in their patients' diet and lifestyle. Often times when we are communicating we want to facilitate change. We want to change how someone is treating us, we want to change an appointment, and we want to change our own habits and so forth. Because our communications are so



frequently about making change, we need to recognize that change is hard for people and take that into account when we formulate our communications.

The best way to facilitate change is to link that change to some larger desire that the person may have. This can provide great motivation. For example, if one of my clients is a professional golfer and I want her to drink more water, telling her that drinking more water will be better for her health may not provide her with a great deal of motivation. However, if her desire is to get better at golf and I explain that drinking more water will help improve body function and provide her with the physiological freedom to hit the ball further. So I show how drinking water will help her to reach her desired goals and therefore provide her with a motivation to do it.

Similarly, if I the employer in our previous examples wants to motivate her employee to come to work on time everyday, the best way to do this would be to show him how doing so would help him to reach his goals. You might explain that opening on time may mean more customers, the appearance of better customer service and therefore more profits and better pay for the employee. In short, your communications motivate your listener more effectively when they recognize the listener's desires.

When it comes to identifying motives, please remember the basic structure of spiritual development that I've shared with you throughout the program. We all come into life as a Camel, responding to "Thou Shalt," but very few people enjoy the life of a camel or a thou-shalter. Just because they are a camel at this point, that doesn't mean that they enjoy it. They simply have yet to reach the point in their life where they can say no. They haven't reached the strength of will to become a Lion. If you tell a camel what to do, it usually leads to passive aggression. A camel isn't strong enough to tell a Lion how they feel quite often, or what their reaction is to being talked to in a given way. What they often will do is tell all of the other workers, for example, about their bad feelings or their anger. They are much more willing to share their negativity than their positivity. It's just one of the traits of our culture and it inhibits our ability to communicate effectively.

So when you're working with a camel, remember this saying, "feed, don't bleed." The meaning of the saying is that camels don't respond well to force. Don't whip the camel



until it bleeds, but rather feed it or coax it and it will respond more positively. Identify your camel's dream and this is the carrot or the positive motivation that will lead to the right kinds of communication and behavior.

In contrast to camels, the lion will typically only give way to a child. As you know, lions are aggressive, intelligent, experienced and usually have extremely strong egos. Lions can often only hear their own dream. So if you're speaking to a lion, my recommendation is that the first thing you do is to once again identify their motive. With lions, you may be more effective in aligning your own motives with theirs. My experience with lions is that you may actually have more success by allowing them to think that the change is their idea. You have to have enough intelligence and a flexible enough ego to allow that to happen. If you have two lions communicating then they're always playing tic-tac-toe to see who is going to come out on top. If you're communicating with a lion that is a co-worker, family member or loved one and you are trying to create change, it may be best not to challenge their ego with your own. You're more likely to generate resistance to the change. While this may make dealing with a lion difficult, the lion can be tremendously productive as well. If you can learn to communicate with a lion you can usually create change quickly.

The easiest person to communicate with by far is the child. If you remember the pyramid of the Chakras, your camels are down at the bottom, working to master the first and second Chakras. The lions are working on mastering the third Chakra. The child can range anywhere from the fourth to seventh Chakra. So the child is the most advanced in terms of mastering the psychological issues that are representative of each of the Chakras. The child also makes up the smallest percentage of the population, so while they are great communicators, there are just very few people out there that truly fall into the category of the child. Even more so than the lion, the child is able to effect great change in their life and in the lives of others, primarily because they aren't heavily polarized. Lions are like warriors who generate a response from others only because they're afraid to be attacked. The child, however, is capable of loving you and allowing you to think that almost everything is your idea, but they are also willing to be present with you. They adapt, they listen and they understand.



Adapt

We've talked so far about understanding your listener's motives and being specific, but that isn't enough. Different people react in different ways to different styles of communication. For this reason, it is important to adapt your communication style to the listener. There are a number of ways that you can do this and I'll discuss them here.

Because many of our communications are meant to help our target learn something, it is important to *identify the target's learning style* – visual, kinesthetic, mathematical-logical, or auditory. If you don't do this, it is going to be much more difficult for you to convey the sort of information the listener needs in order to learn what you need them to learn. If your motive is to help your listener learn something, you might begin your conversation by asking, "How do you learn best?" or "What is your learning style?" Once you know the learning style of your target, you can adapt your communications to match the way they learn best.

In addition to having our own learning styles, we all have our own natural pacing or *rhythm of communication*. You've probably had the experience of speaking with someone that talked really fast. Likewise, you've probably spoken with someone that conversed really slowly. There are a number of ways you can adapt your conversation to make the communication more effective. If the pace is too fast, slowing down your own contributions just a bit is one way of leading your target or pacing your target so they will slow down a bit themselves without having to say, "Whoa! Slow down!" Likewise, you can lead a conversational partner to speed up a bit by increasing your own pace slightly. Again, this slight adjustment is often just enough to prompt them to speed up without having to ask for it. If the person's pacing is quite different from your own, you don't want to prompt them to come too far out of their natural pace, because their pace reflects their natural processing pace as well. Speed them up or slow them down too much and they may have a much more difficult time assimilating the information you're presenting them with. It's much better to try to find some mutually acceptable pace and that way communication will go much more smoothly.

Word choice can also affect the conversation and the rhythm of the conversation. In his *Dianetics*, L. Ron Hubbard shows that if someone reads a word that they don't



understand their brain actually stops on that word and even if their eyes continue to scan over the text, they won't pick up what their eyes are seeing. Their brain will continue to process over the word they hadn't seen before. The same can happen in a spoken conversation. If you use a word that someone doesn't understand when speaking to them, they may be stuck trying to determine just what you meant. In the meantime, you're three or four sentences ahead in the conversation. It's important if you want to get your point across to check to make sure that any terms that may be unusual are being understood or make it known that the listener can and should ask for clarification if you do use words with which they are unfamiliar.

It is also important to *understand your target's viewpoint*. Be careful not to close your mind off to your conversational partner's ideas because your viewpoint is different from theirs. Often times when I'm speaking to people that claim to be devoutly religious, I do my best to allow myself to imagine life from their viewpoint. I have to, because their own viewpoint is often so limiting that if I don't try to understand their view I simply won't be able to communicate with them. This is a way of connecting to the listener that allows you to see how their view limits them and how you can communicate your ideas within the bounds of those limitations. It's also a way of understanding *why* they are saying the things they do. Understanding their view can head off some of the negative emotions that might arise from the conversation. As my Mother always says, "connect before you correct." You may not be trying to correct whomever you're speaking to, but connecting with them allows you to be present with them, which allows you a greater opportunity to be compassionate with their position in life. In short, understanding your target's viewpoint means you'll be better able to word your communications in such a way that is acceptable to them and you'll better understand why they say the things they do, making it less likely you'll be offended.

In a related vein, it's equally important to *understand the emotion behind a person's communications*. If you are communication with someone whose emotions are disrupting their ability to communicate effectively, the natural thing that people tend to do is get swept away by the other person's emotions. But if you want to be an effective communicator, then you must self-manage and use your emotional stability to help ground somebody else's emotional stability. For example, I've been on the scene of car



accidents occasionally or near them when somebody was traumatized and many people around such situations get highly emotional and start behaving irrationally. In order for us to be effective communicators, we must manage our own emotions and in so doing we help other people manage theirs.

Finally, in addition to having an emotional quality and a pacing, most communications have *intensity*. By intensity here I mean passion or seriousness. If someone is communicating at a level that is so intense it is making you uncomfortable, or someone isn't taking you seriously, you may need to alter your own intensity level accordingly. When you speak you need to be sensitive to the fact that your level of intensity can affect how you speaker will receive what you're trying to say. Do they respond well to a good deal of passion? Or does that turn them off? Do they react badly to relaxed or humorous approaches to more serious topics?

Repeat and Reinforce

Feedback assesses the clarity of your conversation. So if somebody repeats back to you what you've just said, you know that they have understood what it is that you were trying to convey. It also reinforces the point for the target. You can do this in a number of ways. You can ask them straightforwardly to repeat back to you what you have said. You can ask the target, "Can we agree upon...?"

If you are making a request of someone, it is probably a good idea to follow up the repetition with something like, "Are you happy or comfortable with this arrangement?" Why is this important? Asking them about their feelings regarding your arrangement makes your listener aware of the fact that you are sensitive to their needs. It also opens the door for them to make adjustments to the arrangement that both of you are comfortable with and which allow them to complete their part of the arrangement more effectively.

Repeating and reinforcing can also be a helpful tool because it allows the speaker to hear their own words. This opens the opportunity for reflection on what they've said and many times they will correct themselves, either being more specific, taking into account emotional impact that they might not have considered and so forth. This may also help



them to correct an inaccuracy. They may have misheard you or misunderstood and so the repetition provides an opportunity for correction.

Time Out!

Now sometimes, no matter what you try, either your listener or you may start to feel anger, jealousy or some other emotion during your conversation. When it gets to that point and you sense the downward turn in the conversation, the best thing you may be able to do is to take a time out. Find a polite way to continue the conversation at another time so that the both of you can continue it in a clearheaded, objective way. If you remember the last lesson, you'll recall that your black dragon is the negative in any experience and the white dragon is the positive. If you match someone else's black dragon in a conversation you've got two black dragons and that's a surefire recipe for trouble! If you get upset, the nature of the universe is that everything is moving. Every atom, every sub-atomic particle, every planet and every organism is moving in some way. If it's here, it's moving. This means that all black dragon energy must move towards white. That's the only direction it can go. This is because the black dragon energy has the seed of white dragon energy in it. As I've said in other chapters, Yin has Yang in it and Yang has Yin in it. So the message is, don't lose heart if your conversation starts to steer towards the black dragon energy. Take a time out and you'll have the opportunity to move back towards something more positive.

We can put the same point another way. There's an old saying that goes, "You can't find blue, if you're seeing red." Interestingly enough, blue is the color of communication, while red is the more primal, self-preservation Chakra. So, in other words, if you let your ego take over and you try to "win" the conversation, you are more likely to lose out on communication. Or, if you are very aggressive or using accusatory language in a conversation you are likely to trigger your listener's red Chakra, driving them into the mode of self-preservation rather than open communication. Once again, if you feel yourself or your listener drawing on the red Chakra more and more heavily in the conversation, it's best to simply step aside and let things cool down before you continue.

Roadblocks to Communication



Leverage

Leveraging in a conversation can be a serious deterrent to real communication and you should avoid it at all costs. Leveraging is the use of some sort of force, e.g. bringing up favors done for the listener in the past, to convince the listener that they owe the speaker something. It's a way of strong-arming some end that the speaker wants. For example, "I know you aren't a huge fan of the Symphony, but would you go with me tonight? I went to that horror movie with you last weekend" is a form of leveraging.



Leveraging is also a common technique used in our upbringing. Not only do many parents use it, "clean your room or no dessert tonight," but also our school systems use it, our police force uses it and our military uses it. It's so pervasive that it's hard not to use it ourselves when we interact with others.

The problem with leveraging is that it turns any communication into a win-lose situation. In the example above, the listener is treated as being in debt. They "owe" the speaker a trip to the Symphony. The implication is that if they don't go to the symphony, then there will be some sort of trouble or consequences. The listener is being forced into doing something, when perhaps they might have done it anyway. No one wants to be a loser, and leveraging assures that someone will feel like a loser. This may have consequences for the relationship down the road. There may be future resentment or reluctance to ask one another to do anything. In short it makes future communication much more difficult.

P~P~S Mentor Alex Censor has another way of describing the problem with leveraging. As he puts it, when someone uses leverage, the listener's "willingness meter" goes down. In his "Five Properties of an Effective Request," Alex relates a story in which my mother (his wife) asked him to do the dishes. When she asked, she used leverage, and in turn Alex's willingness or desire to do the dishes was diminished. People simply don't like to be forced to act, especially when they might have engaged in the action anyway. You would *much* rather have someone perform your request because they wanted to than because you forced them to. They'll perform the action with more energy and enthusiasm than they would otherwise.



How can you avoid leverage or the need for leverage? Find the motive, identify the dream, see if you can align your interests and then you won't need leverage. If both the speaker's and the listener's motives are aligned, then there's no need for leverage. You are moving together towards the same end.

Judgment

You may have noticed so far that I've been trying to develop techniques for you to avoid creating negative feelings in your communications, whether you generate them in yourself or your listener. Being able to see clearly what is being conveyed to you and to convey your own ideas equally clearly and objectively is an essential component to good communication. This is why *judgment* can be such a deterrent to open and honest conversation. In the example of the employee arriving to work late twice in six months, the employer might have judged him as lazy or disinterested. If that is the case going into their conversation about the tardiness, it may be difficult for the employee to explain why he was late and there may be a very good reason why he was late. The employer may simply not want to hear it because she has already rendered her judgment. Moreover, if she makes that judgment clear in the conversation, "You've been late twice in the past six months and I think this is because you simply aren't interested in your job," the employee is likely to shut down. He may indeed lose interest in the job after his boss says this to him. In many cases, this sort of judgment can make a situation that could have been resolved easily into a big mess.

You can avoid expressing judgment in your communications in part by dealing in your own wants, needs and feelings. You can begin your sentences with an expression like "I am wanting" or "I am feeling" and often times this transforms a sentence that is accusatory into a more neutral statement. For example, the employer dealing a tardy employee might say, "I am wanting to share my feelings with you about opening the office at 8:00 am every morning." Contrast that with, "I'm really pissed off that you're late to work. We need to talk." The latter sentence is accusatory. It's judgmental and it's much more likely to trigger an emotional reaction in the tardy employee that will interfere with resolving the situation in a quick and painless fashion.



Negativity

Stay in the positive whenever you're conversing with someone. Only water what you want to grow. I'm sure you remember from Lesson 1 that I talked about weeds in the mind. We are heavily programmed to the negative by the government, corporations and often times by our friends and family as well. These are the sorts of weeds that we want to avoid nourishing. And you don't want to encourage negativity in your listener. Staying in the positive means avoiding accusation. For example, the employer from our running example could say, "Bob, I really appreciate it when you open the office on time in the morning." Or, she could say, "Bob it really upsets me when you show up late in the morning." Now both of these statements get at the same idea, but the first has the energy of levity to it, while the second has a negative emotion attached to it. So the employee didn't arrive at the office on time, which is a negative, but his employer is responding with a positive, noting what she likes about his behavior. If you put the positive and the negative together, then you're in a neutral position, which is a position that is much easier to handle. Now Bob may be much more likely to open the office on time. On the other hand, if the employer chose the negative expression, Bob may be put on the defensive and depending upon how the conversation goes, he may feel he's being leveraged into opening the office. In that case the negativity of the conversation will most likely continue to carry through to his work in the office. He may even go out of his way to come in late, perform poorly in his own work and speak badly about his boss behind her back, all the while searching for a new job. So just remember that positive energy overrides negative energy and so you should stay in the positive whenever possible.

Correcting before Connecting

If the aim of your communication is to change the behavior of your listener, the most important first step is to connect with your listener. As with judging or leveraging, you are likely to trigger a negative emotional response if you try to correct your listener's behavior without identify their motive and identifying with their needs, wants or desires first. In fact, correcting before connecting is likely to be interpreted, perhaps correctly, as judging or leveraging thereby triggering all of the roadblocks to effective communication associated with those problems.



When the goal of your communication is correction, make certain that what you are correcting is the action that you want to change and not the person. Again, correcting the person is likely to be perceived as judgment or as an attack and therefore short-circuit the goal of the conversation by triggering a negative emotional response. So for example, our employer that wants her employee to be on time might know that her employee is saving to buy a new car. She might connect and then correct in the following way. “Bob, I really appreciate it when you open the office at 8:00 am. Now I know that you really want to buy your self a new car. If you can agree to be here at 8:00 am every day, we’re more likely to sell more of our product and eventually, the success of the business will mean you’ll have more income as well.” Notice how the employer identifies a dream or desire that her employee has and then connects the correct behavior to that dream. She also has something positive to say about her employee and avoids correcting him as an individual. I’ve found this *connect before you correct* formula to be helpful in all sorts of situations and I highly recommend it.

Homework Assignment

Start by writing out a list of people that you find challenging to communicate with. Try to use the S.M.A.R.T. approach with those people and keep a log or journal about your communications with them. You might track which of the particular S.M.A.R.T. components you are having the most difficulty employing with them so that you can better adjust your communications. You should also use your journal to reinforce the positives. Don’t simply focus on your weakness – it’s good to know your strengths as well.

Next, create a mind-map for any problems that you are having and use that mind-map to help you evaluate your difficulties. For example, if there is someone that triggers your black dragon when they speak to you, someone that requires you to move to the time-out component frequently, try to map out what it is they do that triggers that reaction in you. Mind mapping can be an important tool here because the process of creating the map accesses both the subconscious and the conscious mind.



Conclusion

The main goal behind the S.M.A.R.T. talk is to help you to avoid certain common roadblocks to communication. These roadblocks often trigger negative reactions in our listener or inhibit us from truly hearing what the speaker has to say. In either case no participant in the conversation is likely to be happy with the outcome. So always remember to use the following five components of the S.M.A.R.T. talk technology when you're communicating with someone:

Specificity

Motivation

Adaptation

Repetition and Reinforcement

Time-out

If you can use these five components in your daily conversations, I think you'll find your communication is stress free and both you and your listener will be happy with the outcome.

This is the end of Lesson 11: Communication. I look forward to working with you in Lesson 12 on your listening skills – a natural extension of this Lesson.