



# PRIMER: COMMUNICATING SUCCESSFULLY

## Essential Question

### *What does effective communication look like?*

Whoever we are, whatever we do, and wherever we live, we all have to communicate with other people. Sometimes this can mean one-to-one communication, and sometimes it is a single person communicating with a large group.

Effective *communication* is essential in all areas of life, especially if there is a team involved and whose members have to collaborate with each other. For example, the leader of a team may have in mind how the team should move forward and what its priorities should be. But unless this understanding is properly shared with others, then the team will not function properly and its goals will not be achieved. The way this information is shared is through effective communication.

In the past, prior to the use of technology, there were fewer ways of communicating with others. You could speak face to face to those who were located near you and write a letter to those who were not. Messages could only be communicated as fast as a ship could sail, a horse could run, or a pigeon could fly.

Today, thanks to the telephone, email, social media, and other methods, there are many more opportunities for communication and many more ways to communicate. But even so, we must continue to make sure we are communicating not just frequently, but effectively. In other words, more communication does not necessarily mean better communication.

Whether we are speaking, texting, or writing a letter, we are always communicating through words. Words are clearly important. As the great American author and wordsmith Mark Twain once declared:

*The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.*

But sometimes we can communicate, not just through our choice of words, but also through how we use those words. Imagine that you have a part-time job as a dishwasher in a restaurant and one day your boss walks into the kitchen and sees beside your sink two chipped coffee cups, a broken plate,

#### VOCABULARY

##### *communication*

written or spoken exchanges between people to share information

##### *nonverbal communication*

a form of communication in which people use gestures and body language to



and what looks like a stack of soapy dishes you had forgotten to rinse. If she then says sarcastically “Good job!” do you think your boss is really giving you a compliment on how well you are doing? What is important here is not the words she uses but the tone.

Your boss could well be using *nonverbal communication*. Let’s assume that as she says “Good job!” her face is angry and she slams her fist down onto a table, then she immediately turns her back and storms out of the kitchen. If you still had any doubt about what she was feeling, you now know for sure: Your boss is not happy.

Communication, then, can be a tricky process! It can depend not just on word choice, but also on tone and nonverbal cues. But there is another requirement for effective communication; it has to be two-way. For instance, what if you were able to tell your boss the following before she left?

- You had set aside the two chipped cups because two diners had complained about them, and you wanted to make sure that they didn’t get used again.
- The plate had broken when one of the chefs had accidentally put a heavy pot on it.
- You had set aside the still-soapy dishes because the hot water was all used up, and you knew if you waited a few minutes there would be plenty of hot water to rinse them.

To communicate effectively, we must always be sure to be intentional in how we communicate. In other words, we must be aware of what it takes to communicate well and put those *best practices* to use. As the famous writer Maya Angelou once said:

*I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

#### VOCABULARY

##### *best practices*

activities or procedures that are more efficient and effective than others that exist

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. For what activities in life is communication essential?
2. Can you think of a time when you failed to communicate properly?  
What was the result?
3. Why is communication a two-way process?
4. Why are words alone not enough to communicate effectively?