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These are **teaching notes**. They are written from the program leader's perspective, as if the program leader is speaking. They are detailed but not comprehensive. My goal is to give you all the concepts and tools of the program, along with a flavor of my teaching style. You should find here enough information to evaluate whether the program is useful for you, or enough detail to develop it for your own organization.

You'll also find teaching tips or clarifications shaded in gray.

These teaching notes make more sense if you've already read the **Program Overview and Setup** document. It's also best to read the session documents in order, because later sessions build on the work of earlier sessions.

## Session 2 Topics

- Group 1 relationships
- Observations
- Words and meaning
- Communication behavior
- If you can't communicate, you can't manage
- Communication models
  - Mirror neurons
  - Interpersonal gap
  - Ladder of assumption
  - Satir modes and leveling behavior
  - Listening

- Participants will begin to practice facilitation skills by leading portions of group discussions.

### Session 2 Key Concepts

- Communication is 80% of a manager's daily job
- Communication is behavior
- Effective communication is clear, transparent and authentic
- Effective communication works to close the interpersonal gap.

These concepts are essential underpinnings of the Humans At Work<sup>SM</sup> program. Do not substitute other concepts unless you are prepared to reconfigure the entire program accordingly. If you are not familiar with these concepts, don't lead this session. These skills should be introduced and demonstrated by expert practitioners who can model the behavior as well as describe it.

You'll find basic handouts for all sessions in the Tools and Materials document.

### Homework assignments due for this session

1. Complete the Network Map and Group 1 relationship assessment.
2. Take a step to initiate or strengthen at least one Group 1 relationship.
3. Words and Meaning project.
4. Read **Difficult Conversations** (pp xv-20), **Oxford Guide to Plain English** (pp 1-41), and active listening articles.
5. Begin reading Carolyn Hax online and record reflections in journal.
6. Contact manager and schedule interview.
7. Observe values and relationship behavior and record observations.

### Session 2 Agenda

<b>9:00</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>Open session (see notes)</b>
9:05		
<b>9:10</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>Observations (see notes)</b>
9:15		
9:20		
<b>9:25</b>		
<b>9:30</b>		
<b>9:35</b>		
9:40	<b>2.3</b>	<b>Group 1 relationships (see notes)</b>
9:45		
9:50		
9:55	<b>2.4</b>	<b>Words and meaning (see notes)</b>
10:00		
10:05		
10:10		
10:15		
10:20		
10:25		
10:30		<b>BREAK (10 minutes)</b>
10:35		
10:40	<b>2.5</b>	<b>Communication behavior (see notes)</b>
10:45		
10:50		
10:55		
11:00		
11:05		
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11:25		
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11:35		
11:40	<b>2.6</b>	<b>Session manifesto: If you can't communicate, you can't manage (see notes)</b>
11:45		
11:50		
11:55		
12:00		<b>LUNCH (1 hour)</b>
1:00	<b>2.7</b>	<b>Communication models (see notes)</b>
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4:20	<b>2.8</b>	<b>Summary remarks, final questions and comments (see notes)</b>
4:25		
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4:40		
4:45		
4:50	<b>2.9</b>	<b>Wrap up (see notes)</b>
4:55		
5:00		<b>Session ends</b>

## Session 2 teaching notes

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### 2.1 Open Session

- A. Brief review of Session 1 outcomes
- B. Session 2 goals

#### 2.1 A -- Review Session 1

In Session 1, we learned:

- Above all, managing is behavior.
- Good management behavior is driven by the values of clarity, authenticity and transparency.
- How we behave as managers determines whether we have effective relationships with people at work.
- And it all starts with us – our vision of ourselves as great managers, and our courage to undertake the work.

Do you have any questions about what we did in Session 1?

#### 2.1 B -- Session 2 goals

Today we focus on the most important subset of management behavior – how we communicate as managers. We will:

- Talk about how managers use communication
- Look at good and bad communication behavior
- Introduce you to some useful models of communication – ways that communication can fail, and ways to make it more effective

And it's time to start practicing the facilitation skills you need to be a good manager. Beginning today, there will be places where I'll ask one of you to step in and take over as facilitator. You'll lead the discussion, record ideas on the flip chart, and keep things flowing.

You will not have to teach topics or have answers. The point is to practice leading others in discussion – you'll need this skill for any meetings you run. I'll coach you and we'll debrief afterwards.

## 2.2 Observations

**Group discussion of homework assignment:** Talk about your observations of values in action, or relationship behavior. Be specific. What did you take from your observations that will help you as a manager?

This is where participants begin to integrate the basic program concepts into their own experience. There are no "right" answers – the goal is for participants to be specific about what they observe, and to begin working together to deepen their understanding of good human management skills. Encourage everyone to participate, but don't force it – some participants may need time to get used to reporting about themselves in this way.

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## 2.3 Group 1 relationships

**Group discussion of homework assignment:** What steps did you take to initiate or strengthen a Group 1 relationship? How did it go? How did you feel about doing it?

Keep an eye on the time – people like to report success, and may want to extend the conversation. If that happens, let them know you can raise the topic again at lunch. Keep this discussion to 15 minutes or less.

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## 2.4 Words and meaning

**Group discussion of homework assignment:** Talk about your experience from this project. Share the observations and conclusions you think are most important to you as a manager.

The goal of this discussion is to make sure participants realize that people can take very different meanings from "common" words.

If you are working with group of 8-10, you may wish to make these table group discussions rather than a full-group discussion, so that everyone has a change to share some of their results.

The fundamental goal of communication is to reach a shared understanding.

What I want you to take away from this project is that we don't necessarily assign the same meaning to words -- which are our most basic communication tool. Think about how that affects communication.

In the next few days, I'd like everyone to post your project write-ups to the group. If you want, you can share additional new thoughts or conclusions as well.

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## 2.5 Communication behavior

**Group discussion:** Share a story of a time in your experience when communication was good or bad – when it went well or went horribly wrong. I'd like workplace stories, but stories outside the job are also fine. Be specific about the behavior that makes you characterize it as 'good' or 'bad' communication. What was the result of the situation?

Be ready with a story of your own to get things started, if necessary.

Make sure you get specific details of behavior in each story, and when possible link the behaviors back to people being (or not being) clear, transparent or authentic. Also encourage participants to analyze the impact of the behavior on the relationship between the people involved.

Encourage a balance between stories of "good" and "bad" behavior so participants have a chance to discuss a range and to begin identifying patterns. We learn behavior patterns better when we have examples both of what to do and what not to do.

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## 2.6 Session manifesto: If you can't communicate, you can't manage

Please read the Manifesto section in the Program Overview and Setup for more guidance about the session manifestos.

Put the manifesto in your own words. Testify. And remember that your purpose is to show participants how today's concepts and ideas are related to each other, to the work of previous sessions, and to good management in general. This is where you bring it all together.

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Start every manifesto with a personal story.

Today's story should be about how a manager's communication skill (or lack of it) and style impacts people and business.

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Managers accomplish work through other people. Managers need effective working relationships to do this. You build effective working relationships through behavior that is clear, authentic and transparent.

We'll spend the remainder of this program, and you'll spend the remainder of your lives as managers, learning those skills. And I will tell you now that the most important skill you can have as a manager is the ability to communicate effectively with the people around you.

Here's a news flash: the people you interact with at work are different from you. They have different values, different fears, different hot buttons, and different responses to information. Effective communication is about sending clear messages to people who are different from you. It's about achieving shared understanding so that everyone is working from the same basis and heading toward the same goal.

We see in the words and meaning exercise that often the same single word means different things to different people. That's why effective communication is so much work. And why it's so important.

Everything you do is communication – everything sends a message (words, tone, facial expression, body language, your listening behavior, who you pay attention to, where you look when someone is speaking, etc.). And this communication is not just about the business meaning. It's also carries emotional meaning. We'll see in the communication models we study today that humans assign meaning to every aspect of communication.

And that turns any communication you have into a relationship. So you must be effective on the human level as well as on the business level.

Let's revisit the basic core values of good managers and look at how they apply to communication.

**Clarity.** Your messages are clear in every way – business context, factual

content, and emotional content. You share complete information with everyone who needs to know it, with a minimum of spin. You create a shared understanding.

When you are clear, then people around you can also be clear. They will make more informed decisions and do their work more effectively.

Offer a compelling personal story that illustrates clarity in communication.

**Transparency.** Part of sending clear messages is to articulate your thinking – to talk about your own values, decision-making, information gathering, bias, blind spots, strengths, etc. You let people see how you work inside.

Transparency is vital to trust and to effective delegation. If you spend enough time making your thinking transparent, two things happen: first, people begin to trust that your actions align with your values – that you really mean it about treating them like humans at work, and about supporting the team. Second, the people who work for you learn enough about how you think to have confidence in making decisions that affect work – they know what you would say or what you would think is important in a situation. You can trust them to make the right call.

Offer a compelling personal story that illustrates transparency in communication.

**Authenticity.** Your communication is genuine. You tell the truth as you know it, and you bring your real feelings and opinions to the party. You present your real self to the people you work with. The manager relationship is too important for you to be pretending to know things you don't know, believe things you don't believe, and say things you don't mean. People can spot that kind of fakeness a mile away.

Offer a compelling personal story that illustrates authenticity in communication.

The single most important thing you can do as a manager is communicate in ways that are clear, transparent and authentic. Even when it's awkward or hard. And you have to do it in every single communication you have.

We'll be talking about these skills in some fashion in every remaining session of the program. You'll have plenty of time to discuss, to think, to feel, and to practice. But always, always what we will be practicing is how to be effective by being clear, transparent and authentic.

## 2.7 Communication models

- A. Mirror neurons
- B. Interpersonal gap
- C. Ladder of assumption
- D. Satir modes and leveling
- E. Listening

We're going to spend the rest of today looking at various models of communication – various ways of understanding how human communication breaks down and how it can work better.

If questions about conflict come up during the discussion of these concepts, reassure the group that you will get into details of conflict resolution in Session 7. Do not allow yourself to be derailed into a detailed discussion of conflict resolution in this session.

### 2.7 A -- Mirror neurons

Communication happens between people on multiple levels. It's not just the content – it's in the words you choose, your tone of voice, pace, facial and body language. One theory about why this happens is based in research on **mirror neurons**.

Mirror neurons are a type of neuron in the brain that fires both when I perform an action myself, and when I see you perform the same action. In other words, when I see you do an action, the neuron in my brain fires exactly the same way as if I were doing it myself. It's speculated that this is how we understand intention in others – because our brains process other people's behavior exactly the same way we process our own.

Example: You're walking down the hall at work and you see two people talking. You can't hear their voices. But you know that they are disagreeing. How do you know? What do you see that makes it clear?

Example: If I say, "Even *you* should be able to handle this," what message am I really sending? How do you know?

Example: If you come to me with an idea and I raise my eyebrows and fold my

arms while you're talking, what does that tell you? If I raise my eyebrows and nod while you're talking, what does that tell you?

It's a human trait to assign meaning to behavior. That's how we make sense out of the world around us. When you communicate with people around you, their mirror neurons are firing and they are assigning meaning all over the place. This is even more significant when you remember that we tend to be hyperaware of how our own manager is behaving.

It's also significant because we don't all have the same experience of the world, and so we may not assign the same meaning to behavior (the same way we don't all assign the same meaning to words). You just have to look at the way different people respond to a hand reaching out – some people interpret it as a threat, some as a gesture of affection, etc. depending on how others have reached out to them in the past.

You can also draw examples from the communication behavior stories that participants told in the morning. Find as many examples as necessary until participants understand the basic concept that human brains are hardwired to interpret behavior.

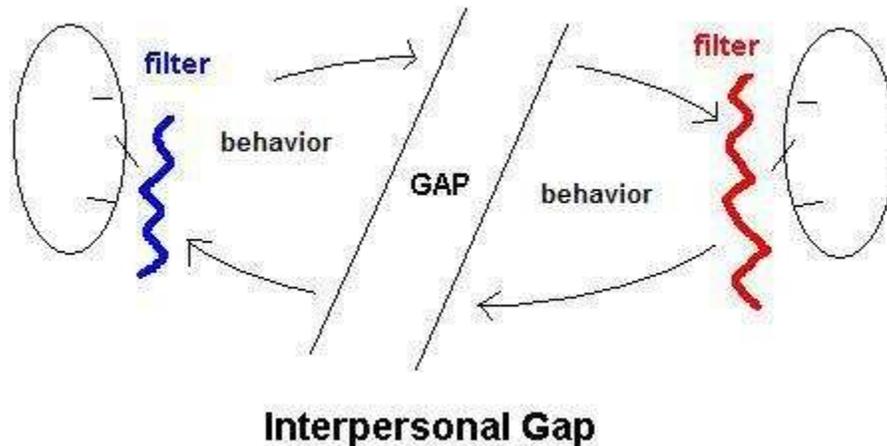
One of my favorite demonstrations of mirror neurons at work is to take a baseball bat into the room and hold it in a variety of poses, asking participants to characterize the behavior. I start as someone familiar with baseball; then change to someone unfamiliar with batting; then change the grip suddenly to the stance of someone ready to use the bat as a weapon. Try this and watch everyone flinch – you don't even have to swing on someone in order for everyone to understand the threat.

### **2.7 B -- Interpersonal gap**

Mirror neurons are an important concept because they compel us to always assign meaning – to words, actions, body language, everything around us. But sometimes people find different meanings in the same event, and miscommunication happens. We misunderstand each other all the time. We decide someone has bad intentions, we get defensive, we stop listening. Communication breaks down all the time.

A very useful model for why this happens is the **Interpersonal Gap**. This model is widely used – I've been using it for 15 years -- and is based on the work of John Wallen, Ph.D.

Draw this on flip chart as you explain it. Point participants to the handout in their notebooks, but also encourage them to draw it for themselves in their notes. It will help anchor the learning.



Here's how the Interpersonal Gap works:

1. I have something specific I want to communicate to you. I start the communication (face to face, phone, email, etc.).
2. First, my message has to pass through my personal filters. Personal filters are things that you cannot see, and that I may not even be consciously aware of, but they color my message. Filters might be anything – how my day is going, how I feel about you, whether I had a bad grapefruit for breakfast or a fight with my spouse. My assumptions about you and the situation or my socialization might affect the way I communicate – the words I choose, my body language, etc.
3. You can't see my personal filters, and so you can't be aware of specifically how they affect my communication. In other words, we can't read each other's minds.
4. My intended message, already affected (perhaps distorted) by my personal filters, is now out in the space between us. This is the realm of observable behavior—body language, vocal or physical language stresses (depending on whether I'm speaking or signing), where I'm looking, etc. This is what you see and/or hear. This is when your mirror

neurons start firing.

5. Now the message has to pass through your personal filters, which aren't visible to me. Did you eat a bad piece of corned beef for lunch? Do you like or dislike me? Is some of my observable behavior attractive or objectionable for cultural reasons? Are you in a hurry? Are you tired? All of these factors color the way you receive my message. Your personal filters affect how your mirror neurons interpret my message.
6. By the time my message arrives in your brain, it may be something quite different from what I intend, because of factors that neither of us can control absolutely.
7. You respond to my message not just based on the words – the pure content – but also on how it's colored by my filters and yours. You send a message back to me. And the whole cycle starts over.

The goal of this model is to help you understand that what you think you're sending isn't necessarily what the other person is receiving.

How do we send effective messages in the face of this gap? We make our filters observable if at all possible so that the other person can take them into account.

So when you and I communicate, I need to be aware of my own filters, and I need to check with you to identify your filters or intentions. I need to make sure I'm trying to be **clear** and consciously looking for clarity from you. This might include checking, "Am I being clear?" or saying, "I don't think I'm clear on what you mean."

I need to be as **transparent** as possible about my filters. For example, if I'm in a hurry, I might unconsciously be sending the message that I don't have time for you. In order to avoid that, I should tell you, "I want to talk about this, but I'm late for a meeting. Can we do it in an hour?" Do you see how explaining the filter helps avoid the misunderstanding?

And I have to be **authentic** about my filters. I have to be willing to say, "I'm tired. I'm not tracking. I'm sorry, can you say that again?" Or I have to say, "I'm sorry, this issue is a real source of irritation for me, so bear with me..." If I am not willing to be authentic about my feelings, biases, etc. then communication between us becomes a potential minefield – it's only natural for you to assume that you are irritating me, for example, and then you respond

accordingly, and things get derailed.

One common filter that may affect a manager's communication is being overloaded and distracted. Remember your own experience of trying to talk to someone who you thought wasn't listening -- how easy it is to fall into the interpersonal gap. So practice giving your full attention to the person you are communicating with, even if it is only to say, "I'm sorry, I am so distracted by \_\_\_\_ right now. Can we talk in an hour?"

Another common filter is the reluctance to deliver bad news. Perhaps we're afraid of conflict in general, or the anger of a particular person, or we don't want to be the bad guy. But bad news is part of business and it's your responsibility to be as clear, transparent and authentic about it as about anything else.

**Group discussion:** Can you think of a recent communication incident where a filter got in the way?

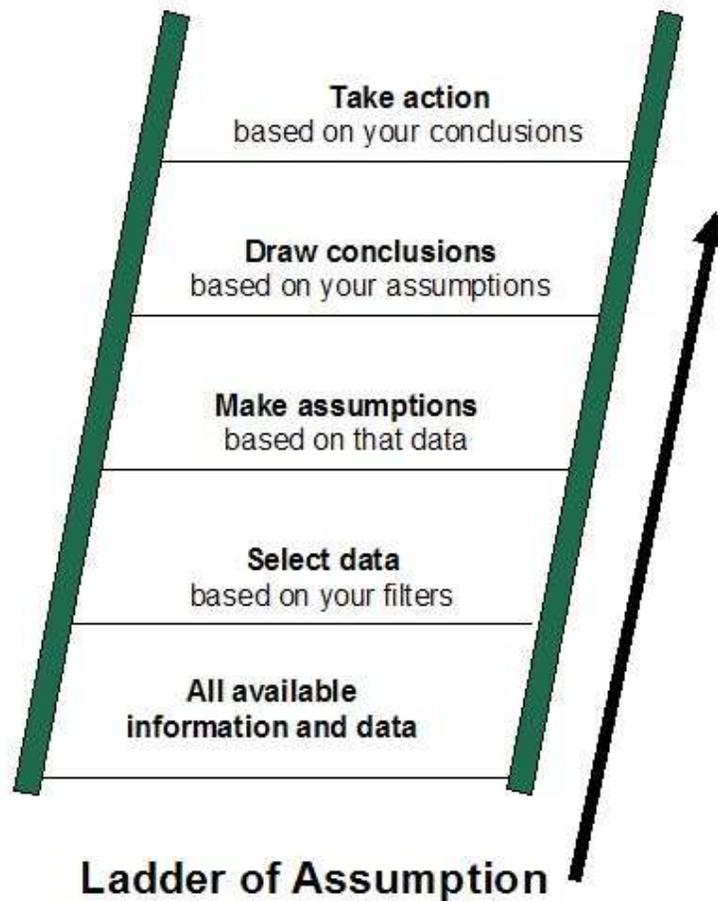
Keep this brief. The goal is simply to start participants thinking about recognizing filters.

### **2.7 C -- Ladder of assumption**

One of the primary filters that we bring to communication – one of the easiest ways to miscommunicate and fall into the interpersonal gap – is assumptions.

The **Ladder of Assumption** (also sometimes called the Ladder of Inference) shows how assumptions work to cause misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Draw this as you explain it. Point participants to the handout in their notebooks, but also encourage them to draw it.



Here's an example of how the ladder works:

1. I am running a meeting that is very important to me. You are a key player in it. You come in very late. You don't apologize or explain. You sit down, don't meet my eyes, and don't participate in the discussion. When I try to draw you in, your answers are brief and unhelpful. You rush out the door immediately after the meeting.

What I've just described is all the **information and data** that's available to me in this situation.

2. I have personal filters – it's an important meeting, it didn't go the way I planned because of your behavior, I'm a little stressed -- so I unconsciously **select data** based on those filters: you were late, you didn't apologize, you didn't participate.

3. I make **assumptions** based on the data I select, and here I go up the ladder. You didn't care about my meeting – you were late, and you didn't even apologize to me. You couldn't even be bothered to contribute. It was so obvious that you were not interested.

Do you see how I am turning my assumptions into statements of fact about your behavior? Spend time listening to people around you, and you'll notice how often people state their opinions as facts.

Opinions are not facts.

4. I draw **conclusions** about you based on these assumptions. You are not supportive of me or my projects. You're not a team player. You are a rude asshole. You don't think I'm important – if you did, you'd show some respect. You don't like me. You'll probably undermine me again if I give you the chance.
5. And then I take **action** based on my conclusions. I stop inviting you to meetings. I reduce my interactions with you and stop sharing information. I get tense every time I pass you in the hallway. I talk to other people about how unreliable you are. Et cetera.

Now let's look at what happened from your point of view. Your boyfriend or girlfriend told you this morning that they were moving out. You had a huge confrontation about it. It made you late to work. You can't concentrate. You know you should be able to 'be professional,' but really you just want to hit something or go off into a corner and cry.

You feel bad about being late because you really do support my project, but then I gave you such a dirty look when you came in that you got mad. People are late, it's not a federal offense! Why am I so uptight? You wouldn't even think of telling me the real reason you were late – I'd probably just think you were weak. Et cetera.

Making assumptions is one of the most common ways that we fall into the interpersonal gap in relationships. You saw in the Words and Meaning exercise that we don't all assign the same meanings to words. Nor do we all 'see' things the same way.

Assumptions aren't just emotionally based. Often we assume others have access to the same data we do, and that they interpret it the same way. So

when they argue a different position, we go up the ladder and assume they are stupid or that they 'have their own agenda.'

**Group discussion:** Do you have stories of a time that assumptions de-railed your work or caused a misunderstanding in a relationship?

Allow this discussion to go on until you are satisfied that all participants have a basic grasp on how assumptions can de-rail communication.

So what do you do?

- If you feel a miscommunication is happening, the first rule of overcoming the gap is to assume good intention on the part of the other person. Because so often we don't – we run right up the ladder and assume the other person is trying to hurt us or embarrass us. Don't do that. Take a breath and then take steps to close the gap.
- Don't assume that people know your biases, your opinions, your information, your rules of communication, your hot buttons, or anything else. If you don't communicate something, you cannot expect others to know it.
- Make sure you are setting context for the discussion. Give all the data you have and be clear about the spin you're putting on it. If you know your assumptions, state them: "I'm assuming that \_\_\_\_."
- Don't state your opinions as facts! State them as opinions. There's a world of difference between "That's a stupid idea" and "I don't like that idea because \_\_\_\_." Guess which one sends people up the ladder faster?
- When a particular word or phrase or body language triggers an alarm in you, don't go up the ladder – nail down its meaning right away by asking for clarification. "Can you help me understand what you mean by \_\_\_\_?"

**Exercises:** Practice recognizing assumptions

You can use one of the following suggested exercises for this practice, or substitute one of your own. The goal is practice in identifying and articulating assumptions, and recognizing how they impact effective communication.

**Group exercise:** Show the group a brief clip of a television or movie scene. Brainstorm with the group to identify the interpersonal gaps, including assumptions at work. Brainstorm how the characters might have clarified their filters and narrowed the gap, and how this might have changed the outcome.

Make sure you are aware of regulations governing fair use of copyrighted material.

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**Table exercise:** Give each table several written scenarios. Have the table members work together to analyze where and how assumptions affect the outcome, and discuss alternative strategies the characters might have used.

Develop these scenarios by providing brief context/background information on the situation and characters, and then present the scenario in the form of a dialogue between the characters.

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**Individual exercise:** Write about an incident where assumptions negatively affected the outcome, and what you might have done differently.

### **2.7 D -- Satir modes and leveling behavior**

American psychotherapist Virginia Satir believed that people in stressful interactions tended to fall into one of five styles of speaking or **language modes**. These involve not just the words we choose, but our delivery – where we put the vocal stresses and emphasis.

We fall into these modes unconsciously, and it can definitely widen the interpersonal gap when people are speaking in different modes in times of stress – and even the most simple interaction with someone at work may seem stressful because of our assumptions and our filters.

Satir identified the behaviors as:

- Blaming
- Placating
- Computing
- Distracting
- Leveling

You'll find much more information on the dynamics of language and effective communication at work in **The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense At Work** by Suzette Haden Elgin. I've used her "Gentle Arts" books for years and find her ideas and suggestions consistently useful, especially in identifying and responding to abusive or aggressive communication even when it is disguised as something else.

Let's look at how the language modes might operate in a typical business situation. Someone makes a pretty standard mistake – screws up a client order.

As you explain the following behaviors, make sure to demonstrate with body language and vocal stress. Act it out – make sure participants can all recognize and identify it. If necessary, provide multiple examples.

**Blaming.** This is a threatening, aggressive and hostile mode with strong body language and strong emphasis on words. Yelling, finger-pointing, slamming doors and generalizing ('always,' 'never,' etc.) are classic blaming behavior.

Managers can fall into blaming behavior when they feel defensive or are afraid people will not recognize their power or authority. Their feelings make them "weak", so they express them strongly. The manager is proving "I'm the boss" by intimidating and humiliating people into obedience.

How blaming behavior might sound/look:

"Were you **on drugs** when you did this? This is **totally unacceptable!** How come you can never get **anything** right? Why are you **always** making excuses?"

Managers who routinely use blaming behavior are hell to work for. They diminish people's spirits, drive away talent, cripple creativity and damage business in any number of ways. They are certainly being clear, but this behavior is neither truly authentic nor transparent.

There are clear, authentic and transparent ways to express strong feelings, including anger, without doing this kind of damage. We'll look at those strategies after we consider other kinds of typical language behavior.

**Placating.** This is an anxious and self-effacing mode, also with strong body

language and strong emphasis on words – but with the focus on building up other people rather than tearing them down. Hunching, defensive hand gestures, excessive praise and constant apologizing language are hallmarks of placating behavior.

Managers fall into placating behavior when they are frightened of other people's anger or disapproval. They feel vulnerable, so they behave as if everyone else's feelings are more important in order to protect themselves. The manager is proving they are "worthy" of the employee's obedience by minimizing any possibility for conflict or direct confrontation.

How placating behavior might sound/look:

"I know you've worked **really** hard on this, I'm **really sorry** to come back to you on it because I **know** it's extra work for you, but I would **really appreciate** it if you'd just, you know, just take care of it. **Okay?** Great!"

Managers who routinely use placating behavior lose credibility with employees and appear weak and unable to "make the tough calls" or "deal directly with the situation." They often sacrifice clarity – giving the hard news or the details – in order to "not upset people."

**Computer.** This is an impersonal and unemotional mode, with minimal body language and word emphasis. Flat delivery, poker face, little use of "I/you" language and speaking in "third person" generalities are all typical of computing behavior.

Managers fall into computing behavior when they believe their feelings are inappropriate at work, or they are confronted by another person's strong feelings and wish to distance themselves. They depersonalize the situation so that the emphasis is on data, actions and conclusions rather than feelings. The manager is proving they are "focused on business."

How computer behavior might look/sound:

"A problem occurred with this order. It appears the problem originated in your area. Please correct the situation immediately. Everyone on this team is expected to pay attention to order details. "

Managers who routinely use computing behavior can appear unconcerned and robotic. There's little authenticity or transparency.

**Distracting.** This is a combination of the other modes. People using distracting behavior cycle between blaming, placating and computer body language and delivery. A rollercoaster mix of blame, appeasement and sudden retreat from personal expression are distracting behavior in action. It's, well, distracting.

Managers fall into distracting behavior when they are feeling completely inadequate to a situation -- they have no idea what their role, responsibility or authority is in the particular circumstances. They have no strategies to deal with the situation, so they try everything to see what "works best."

How distracting behavior might look/sound:

" You **totally screwed up this order!** Okay, sorry, I things get **busy**.... This is an important client and the error must be corrected immediately. Or we are **really** gonna **get it!** Okay? So **fix it** and fix it **right!** I don't mean to sound upset. I just **know** you can do better."

Managers who routinely use distracting behavior lose their connection with people very quickly. They are hard to keep up with. They leave people uncertain and confused. They do not send clear messages.

### **What to do?**

Can you see how these language behaviors can make it harder to communicate clearly, authentically and transparently and maintain a relationship?

It's important to note that these are not personality profiles, they are language habits. Do not go up the ladder because of language behavior – it will interfere with your ability to deal with it. People are not 'blamers' or 'placaters' or 'distracters' or 'computers'. They are people who happen to be using a particular set of language behaviors.

It can especially hard to avoid characterizing people who use blaming behavior as bad people. But stay on target by responding to the specific behavior in the specific situation.

So what do we do?

### **Some general rules:**

- Matching the behavior will escalate it, whatever it is.
- Computer behavior will prevent escalation but may not allow you to fully express your message, especially if the message includes an emotional

- component.
- The expert manager will -- in all interactions, regardless of how much stress is involved and regardless of what others are doing – consistently demonstrate **leveling behavior**.

**Leveling.** Leveling behavior doesn't have the same "typical" physical or vocal characteristics of other modes. In leveling behavior, the content, word choice, body language and stress work together to express the message clearly, authentically and transparently.

Effective managers use leveling behavior in every communication. But in times of stress, when people around you are falling into other behavior modes, it's especially important that you use leveling behavior. This is equally true whether it's a big conflict or the everyday stress of daily work – it's the small everyday moments that set the tone of the team.

Effective managers describe their feelings rather than "doing" their feelings to the other person. The focus is on content, not on drama. The messages are clear without the delivery being overpowering. Confident managers don't need to ram the point down someone's throat, nor do they need to protect others from the truth. They rely on their values of clarity, authenticity and transparency.

Leveling behavior can express anger, frustration, grief, joy – any feeling in any situation. Someone who is using leveling behavior will tell you they are frustrated, and their body language and verbal stress will indicate frustration. They will be authentic about their feelings. Everything will match, and their message will be clear.

Leveling behavior neither avoids nor incites conflict or confrontation. It is the behavior that deals with what is really going on, clearly and effectively.

Effective managers combine leveling behavior with strategies to close the interpersonal gap. They present their best understanding of the situation in a way that is not driven by anything but the need to achieve shared understanding.

How leveling behavior might look/sound:

"This order is incorrect. It looks like we sent the wrong part. You picked the order, and I'd like you to pack up and ship the correct part overnight. Please do that now. Later, I'd like to talk about what happened and whether there are any process improvements we can make to prevent this happening again."

(If the employee gets defensive and goes into Blaming or Placating mode...)

"Right now let's focus on getting the customer what they need, and then we'll look at solutions. I understand you're upset about the mistake. Let me know when it's fixed and we'll take it from there."

Look at the difference between:

- (Blaming mode: yelling, physically overbearing). You've **messed up four times** this week! Are you **stupid**? Or do you just **not care** about our customers?
- (Leveling mode: neutral tone, direct gaze, no sudden moves or aggressive gestures): This is the fourth error you've made this week. It frustrates me and I'd like to understand why it's happening so we can prevent it in the future.

Be prepared to provide other examples of leveling behavior until you are confident that participants understand the concept. Make sure to offer examples that are geared toward everyday stress at work, and also examples that are generally non-stressful. It's important for participants to understand that leveling behavior is appropriate for every communication.

One good strategy is to ask participants to offer one-sentence workplace scenarios that you can respond to with leveling behavior.

We'll get more into communicating through confrontation in Session 7 when we deal specifically with managing conflict. But leveling behavior is always appropriate even in the most mundane interaction at work, and that's what we are going to focus on today.

If you are leveling, you are being clear, authentic and transparent. If you are being clear, authentic and transparent, you are leveling.

It is very exciting at work or anywhere else when people level with each other. It's an amazing thing to participate in or to witness. If you level, and help other people come down off the ledge, you get better results even in the tough situations.

Leveling is essential to interviewing effectively, delegating, managing conflict, managing change, handling performance issues, and creating a productive

team environment. We will be revisiting this and practicing leveling communication over and over in a variety of situations in upcoming sessions.

**Exercises:** Practice recognizing various communication modes and leveling communication behavior.

You can use one of the following suggested exercises for this practice, or substitute one of your own. The primary goal is to practice using leveling behavior to respond to stress situations.

**Group exercise:** Give two participants a conversation scenario. Assign each participant the same language behavior (but not leveling behavior). After thirty seconds, ask one participant to switch behavior to a different mode that you specify. When both participants have made at least one change, then ask both to swap to leveling behavior.

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**Group exercise:** Show the group a brief clip of a television or movie scene. Brainstorm with the group to identify the communication modes in use.

Make sure you are aware of regulations governing fair use of copyrighted material.

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**Table exercise:** Give each person a 3-4 sentence "script" that reflects one of the behaviors and have them act out the script. The other table members identify the behavior and practice responding to it in a leveling manner.

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**Individual exercise:** Ask participants to consider the question, "If I could level with one person about one thing right now, what would I say?" and record the answer in their journal. This is a private exercise at this point, and will be a homework exercise with focus on a workplace situation. It might be useful to give participants private practice before the homework.

## **2.7 E -- Listening**

Select a participant to facilitate the following group discussion. Coach them as

they work. Their goal is to manage traffic, get people's stories clearly, and record the key "bad listening behaviors" on the flip chart.

**Group discussion:** Tell a story about an interaction when you didn't listen to someone, or they didn't listen to you. What happened?

Leave a few minutes at the end of the discussion to check in with the facilitator for questions or comments on what they learned from the experience.

**Listening** is the heart of good communication. It is not something we do while we're waiting for our turn to talk. It is not a passive activity. Without good listening, you do not achieve clarity, authenticity and transparency, and you certainly do not do anything positive for the relationship.

Effective listening is a critical skill to bridging the interpersonal gap. It is how we realize that we are miscommunicating, making assumptions, or receiving or giving a particular type of language behavior.

**Good managers listen.** Effective listening skills are essential for interviewing, running meetings, delivering instructions, making decisions, solving problems, coaching, resolving conflict, and maintaining your network of business relationships.

**Group discussion:** How should we listen? What do we do?

The goal of this discussion is to identify active listening behaviors based on the homework reading. Make sure to cover the basics:

- Listen without criticism or defensiveness even if you do not agree with what is being said, or think it is not important.
- Show that you're listening.
- Listen for both information and feelings.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Paraphrase.
- Respond with leveling behavior.

**Exercise:** practice communication skills.

Have ready a communication skills exercise of your choice. Please make sure the exercise is relevant to the skills of bridging the interpersonal gap; identifying and challenging assumptions; practicing leveling communication; effective listening.

Please do not introduce a conflict scenario to the group at this point. It's tempting to associate these skills only with resolving conflict or having difficult discussions. The important thing is to reinforce that these are skills for everyday use, not just for extraordinary or high-stress situations.

Please do not introduce an exercise that involves formal preparation/structuring of communication – that's covered in the next session.

I recommend either a fun (but illustrative) game, or a role-playing scenario that includes coaching from the rest of the group, so that everyone can be involved. If you go with a role play, develop a scenario that is everyday/ routine, and allows room for assumptions and/or lack of clarity.

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## 2.8 Summary remarks, final questions and comments

Now let's bring these communication elements together:

- Effective communication is one of your fundamental responsibilities as a manager. It's essential to your success.
- Everything you do as a manager is a communication, a message. So these skills and concepts will apply to everything we tackle in all the remaining sessions of this program.
- You are responsible for your communication. As a manager, it's your job to keep communicating until you have achieved a shared understanding. People with more authority and more communication skills are more responsible for the success of communication.
- Effective communication is clear, transparent and authentic. It's level – it reflects the reality of the situation and what's true for you.
- Effective communication takes time and work. Deal with it. The time and energy you spend communicating well up front will save you a hundred times more trouble down the road.
- Today we've focused on some of the common dynamics that help or hinder effective communication.
- We are hard-wired to assign meaning to words and behavior. Our mirror

neurons interpret behavior, tone, word choice and body language automatically. We assign meaning based on our experience of the world. But we don't all have the same experience, so we may not necessarily assign the same meaning.

- And so the interpersonal gap is a given in any interaction between people. We don't have mind-meld. We all have filters and we use them all the time. The trick is not to lose the filters, it's to recognize them and have the skill to navigate through them.

We do this by being clear about the filters as we perceive them. By making our thinking transparent. And by being authentic.

- Assumptions are another given in interactions between people. We all make assumptions. The trick is, again, to recognize them, to prevent them from driving our behavior, and to navigate beyond them. As a manager, you can't afford to go up the ladder of assumption – you'll lose credibility, miss important information and complicate your relationships.

We do this by being clear about our assumptions. By making our thinking transparent. And by being authentic.

- It helps to be aware of how certain communication modes can help create interpersonal gaps. We all default to these modes sometimes. The trick is to recognize them and have strategies for dealing with them.
- The best strategy I know is to always practice leveling behavior.
- And finally, in order to communicate effectively, you have to listen effectively. You have to give it the same attention and energy that you give to expressing yourself. How you listen is part of the communication.

Questions or comments about what we've covered today?

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## 2.9 Wrap up

- A. Preview Session 3
- B. Review homework assignments for Session 3

### 2.9 A -- Preview Session 3

Our next session is also about communication. We will start applying the concepts we've learned today to preparing and delivering messages face to face, by phone and in person. We'll look at what approaches are best in different situations, and we'll practice communicating through different media and in different scenarios.

### 2.9 B -- Homework for Session 3

Refer participants to homework sheet in their notebook. See Tools and Materials section for homework sheet.

1. Post your Words and Meaning project writeups to the email list.
2. For more insight on the concepts we've talked about today, please review the following information in your program or online.
  - Mirror neurons (online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/science/10mirr.html>)
  - Interpersonal Gap (online at [http://hprct.dom.com/2001/presentations/CrosbyHPRCT\\_INTERPERSONAL\\_GAP.pdf](http://hprct.dom.com/2001/presentations/CrosbyHPRCT_INTERPERSONAL_GAP.pdf))
  - Ladder of Assumption (**The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, pp 242-263)
  - Satir modes and additional communication dynamics (**The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense at Work**, pp 59-76)
  - Listening tips (**The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, p 391)
3. Return to your relationship assessment exercise from last time and take another step to initiate or strengthen a Group 1 relationship. This is the last time it will be a specific homework assignment, but please get into the mindset of reviewing and managing your relationships on an ongoing basis.
4. Readings:
  - **Oxford Guide to Plain English**, pp 54-81 and pp 125-142
  - **Difficult Conversations**, pp.25-43 (Chapter 2)
  - **Fierce Conversations**, pp.1-54 (Introduction, Chapter 1 and most of Chapter 2). Make sure you do this early! It is lengthy, and assignment #4 depends on having read it.
5. Do the activity (the "AND" practice) described on pp 31-32 of **Fierce Conversations** for a minimum of 24 hours. Reflect on the experience and

write in your journal about it.

This is a communication behavior activity. You may find it feels artificial to do it for an entire day, but please do it anyway. All of the communication behaviors you are learning will feel awkward as you begin to practice them, and sometimes they will backfire on you until you learn to integrate them into your personal style. Roll with it. If you get funny looks, explain you're doing management program homework.

6. Decide on at least one way to share your ongoing learning in this program with your team or co-workers. Focus on one skill or behavior introduced in this session; provide an overview of the concept; and ask for their help in observing you and offering feedback throughout the coming weeks. You should plan how and when you will seek this feedback from the people helping you.

Let them know that you will be bringing back a skill or behavior from each session that you would like this kind of help with.

With this exercise, you are making yourself accountable to people you work with to learn and practice these skills. You are also beginning to model these behaviors and skills at work, and to influence people around you to do the same.

7. Spend time before the next session observing people at work (yourself and others). Notice communication behavior – people being clear, transparent, authentic (or not), using various communication modes, listening well or poorly.

Record your observations in your journal – note the specifics, and be prepared to tell some of these stories in our next session. Also be prepared to talk about what you take from your observations that will benefit you as a manager.