

Constructing Conversation Workshop 1: Communicating Value

Main points of session 1:

- Public speaking is verbal and non-verbal communication toward an intended audience.
- Communication is a two-way process: not just a “sender” and “receiver”.
- Know your audience
- **Failure is not a bad thing!**

Open the session. *(10 minutes)*

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our workshop on communicating value.

We are all communicators with value. Whether we’re pursuing the entrepreneurial spirit, in search of research funding or scholarships (because school isn’t cheap!), or we’re simply having a conversation with a friend, we want to communicate our ideas in a way that is compelling and induces interest. But *how* do we hold interest? *How* do we get our ideas across to another party? And what tools can we use to increase the clarity of our speaking and the persuasion of our message?

Today, I’m going to define public speaking in a way that should encompass all of our needs. We’ll also talk about communicating value as a two-way process; part of this has to do with knowing your audience. Lastly, failure, in this context, isn’t a bad thing - it may even be a necessity!

Now, I’m sure we’re all feeling a little bit nervous, being with a group of people we’re only now seeing for the first time. I’d like you all to get into groups of 4 and introduce yourselves to each other, by stating your name, your degree, and answering this question to your group:

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

You may have noticed that a few of the spots in this room have some papers upside down on the desks. Feel free to gather around any of these spots to meet your team members and introduce yourself. But whatever you do, do not flip the pieces of paper on the table over. Go ahead now and find a group!

Reconvene for Speech #1. Public Speaking Defined. *(5 minutes)*

It’s time to keep going. Hopefully, you got the opportunity to get to know some of your group members a little better; you’ll be working with them again soon enough!

Since we are Toastmasters, most of our knowledge and experience in communication comes in public speaking. We're going to define public speaking in a moment, but we'll soon see that it and communicating value are largely the same thing.

Public speaking is defined as: Verbal and non-verbal communication toward an intended audience.

Let's break this down into its three parts.

Verbal: includes the words you say (so, syntax and grammar), as well as the quality, tone, and pace of your voice.

Non-Verbal: includes body language/eye contact/hand gestures.

Intended audience: who is your audience? What do you want them to learn? What you want to learn from them?

There are some big consequences of this definition:

First off, the communication has to be intentional. It has to be done with some confidence, which is really only possible if you know your stuff. Furthermore, the level of language that you use must be reasonable for your audience. I'm sure we've all been in classes where the prof has been under the impression that we probably know a bit more than we do, or maybe they've become frustrated when we've asked a question that's totally reasonable!

Secondly, communication is a lot more than just the words you say, but how you say them. As an example, take *Guardians of the Galaxy*. There's a particular character in the movie that's only capable of saying one line: I am Groot. They're able to communicate every emotion they have through using exactly, the same words, with astonishing variance.

Lastly, communication is about finding your voice. Just because words matter, doesn't mean that you have to speak a certain way or use certain words to engage people. In fact, it's a call to describe and explain things in unique ways, using unique ideas to help yourself stand out from the crowd!

With all of these things put together, we're now on the same page about what it means to communicate value as a public speaker.

It's time now for the first breakout session! This is called, "Your Big Idea", and here's how it works. Stay in the groups of 4 you were in for your introductions. On your table, you will have a question facedown. When it's time to start the session, you will flip that question over and try to come up with the best answers you can as a group. Feel free to debate the merits of each idea,

because at the end, one person will have to present on behalf of your group, and give the best idea your group came up with.

Are there any questions?

Go ahead, and start!

Breakout #1: Your Big Idea (6 minutes)

5 preliminary questions; these can be edited as necessary. When delivering this presentation, break the class into 5 and give each one of these questions, enlarged on a sheet of paper. They cannot see them before the exercise begins.

1. Why are lightsaber R2-D2 duels the best form of entertainment?
2. Why should every elevator be equipped with disco music/a disco ball?
3. Why should all midterms be replaced with pizza eating contests?
4. We can now genetically engineer chickens with 3 legs. Why is that awesome?
5. Why do we need National Cauliflower Day?

(During the exercise, go around and ask groups if they have any questions. Also, let them know that each group will have to select 1 member to present their best idea.)

Debrief #1: Verbal Communication

Ok, it's time to reconvene.

It's time to hear from group members about their Big Ideas. I imagine, the questions you were asked to answer we're probably not....quite what you were expecting!

You were each asked to select one member from your group to present the best answer to your question. Let's start going through the groups...

(go through)

Speech #2. The Factor of Failure. (5 minutes)

As you started to communicate with your group members to sell your big idea, you probably started to experience a few negative feelings associated with communication. Maybe some of you struggled at first to get started thinking of ideas. Maybe even some of you withheld ideas from your group for fear of looking "dumb." This last point is the next thing I want to talk about.

On average, a lot of us are worked into what's called a *fixed mindset*. This means that people who are good at a skill are just "naturally talented", and "born with it". This is very different from a

growth mindset, where one believes they can develop any skill given enough hard work and effort. People with growth mindsets believe that their failures are not permanent. I feel that a lot of us would probably be more willing and able to adopt a growth mindset if it were not for the experiences we had in school growing up. On tests and assignments, we're taught to strive for perfection, not progress. And any failures we experiences are etched into the back of our minds by marks or comments of our instructors.

Part of becoming a great communicator is learning to adopt a growth mindset toward communicating. We've all, myself included, started on this process just by being here today. Public speaking is a process that is filled with exactly that kind of failures we're taught to fear anywhere else on this campus. How often have we, or people we know, either flopped on our face answering a question in class, or said something completely embarrassing to a date?

However, our ability to become good communicators is heavily dependent on our willingness to try again. We have a preconceived notion that any sort of failure that we experience will inevitably come back to haunt us, or that people will judge us. In reality, these things don't matter as much as we think they do; they are psychological barriers only. So today, I give you all permission to fail at public speaking and communicating value. In fact, I encourage you to fail as much as you possibly can, because it's the best way to learn how to public speak.

Breakout moving & explanation. (3 minutes)

Now, it's time for our second breakout session. Choose two members of the group you are currently, in and get them to move 1 space clockwise. The other 2 can stay where they are. Go ahead and do that now.

Ok, hopefully you're with two new people who can help you to communicate value.

Now, as we all know, communication is a two-way process. We can talk and talk all we like, but any good conversation has a sender and a receiver. The exercise we're about to do will help you to listen closely to the information being communicated to you, which will allow you to extract more value from the conversations you will have.

This exercise is called "C-hopping" and it works like this: determine who in your group has the longest pinky finger. That person will start a conversation with an interesting statement, like "I just came back from an exchange in Japan!" (If you're struggling to come up with something you find interesting, try the prompt on the table!) Then, the next person, going around the table clockwise, has to respond to that statement, but here's the trick; that person's response has to use one of the words (or a derivative of one of the words) that the first person uses. As an example, if the first person says: "I just came back from an exchange in Japan!", "I was also an exchange student

once too! You get to learn so much about different cultures!” is a great response, because the word *exchange* is in both statements. “You people who go abroad are so annoying!” is not an acceptable response.

Your team “loses” when someone on your team is stuck and doesn’t know what to say.

(do an example)

Are there any questions?

Hop to it!

Breakout #2: C-Hopping. (7 minutes)

5 preliminary phrases. Like before, print onto a piece of paper.

- A. Do you know what’s the worst thing about a monkey that steals your pizza?
- B. The other day in my pack of gum, I had a spider infestation!
- C. What’s your favourite thing about the taste of purple crayon?
- D. What do you do with a PhD in raw egg swallowing?
- E. Did you hear? Donald Trump is going to war with Canada?

Final Debrief + Conclusion. (5 minutes)

Two questions: *What was the most difficult thing about that exercise? Were there any phrases that seemed to stop the conversation more than others?* These are called conversation stoppers, and are best avoided.

Unfortunately, that brings us to the end of today’s workshop.

Session end.