

Effective Communication

Introduction

Possessing good interpersonal communication skills is one of the great strengths of an effective official. To become effective communicators, officials need to be skilled in the following areas:

- ♦ **Written communication**
- ♦ **Verbal communication**
- ♦ **Active listening/talking**
- ♦ **Self-awareness**
- ♦ **Awareness of the barriers to effective listening**
- ♦ **Strategies and techniques to improve communication**

Without effective communication skills and an ability to get messages across, match officials are not capable of managing a match satisfactorily. This process of effective communication is based around understanding how messages need to travel with the use of written, verbal and body language and how messages can be “blocked” or stopped by “barriers”. The use of the right verbal, body and written techniques can make the task of getting the message across very simple and highly effective.

Effective Verbal Communication

It is widely known and accepted that non verbal communication (body language, facial expressions and tone of voice) has more impact than verbal communication. However, we still must make every effort to make what we say effective!

These 6 C’s should provide some direction for such improvement:-

1. Present information **Clearly**
2. Be **Concise** and not long winded
3. Provide **Correct** information that is not misleading
4. Give **Complete** information, not just bits and pieces
5. Be **Courteous** to who you are communicating with
6. Provide **Constructive Criticism** to stakeholders in the game

Communication openers

How often would you use these phrases currently? It is best to use questions to start a conversation or continue it to reach an acceptable outcome. I.e. The messages have been clearly understood.

1. *May I ask a question?*
2. *Before we make a decision, let's review the options*
3. *Can we stop for a second and look at the way we're approaching the problem?*
4. *I'd like to go back a step and clear up something I don't quite understand*
5. *I don't know much about that. How about you?*
6. *Were you aware that?*
7. *Maybe we should reconsider your approach*
8. *I have an idea I'd like to share sometime*
9. *Would you tell me more about what you just said*
10. *Let me ask for some ideas on how I can go ahead with this*
11. *What other ways can we think of?*
12. *If we followed your idea through, what difference would it make?*

- Note the focus / theme of "we" and "us"!
- Never use blocking or confrontational verbal or non verbal language

Understanding

- The same words often don't mean exactly the same thing to any two individuals.

→Paraphrase

e.g. *This is what I understand you are saying ...*

or *I think you mean ...*

Note: responses should take account of their **feelings** i.e. don't just repeat their words like a parrot.

- Beware not to send your own message in your own words

Building Rapport and Communication Skills with Players

The following notes are based on a successful workshop activity that you may attend in your region:

Workshop activity – Use the following 4 headings and ask the umpires to identify what elements might be appropriate to that question / situation and compare them to the suggested list. Discuss and analyse what they come up with and what is important and why.

What does this involve?

- Finding common ground
- Taking an interest in the other person
- Being a human being – taking an opportunity to show people you are human
- Don't try too hard to build rapport – look for the opportunities
- Use of first names

Dealing with Captains prior to the match

- Introduce yourself, your partner and reacquaint prior to the match
- Ask a question or two about their world
- Clarify any necessary playing conditions / facilities
- Ask them for any queries
- Let them know that the umpires are approachable at all times

Dealing with Captains post match / end of day

- Bowler's actions to review?
- Player behaviour issues?
- Clarify starting time for the next day if necessary
- Post match meeting
- Player feedback if necessary

What communication is appropriate with players?

- A positive comment about the match
- Recognition of a milestone
- Recognition of a debut / selection
- A positive comment about a performance
- Working / managing a bowler with his feet placement
- Progress on over rates

Verbal and non verbal intimidation from players

- It's natural in sport and it's going to happen – it's not about you
- Don't let the situation get to you
- Preparation and visualising a positive outcome will help

* Make an effort (when appropriate) to pass a positive comment to build rapport / respect, which will make it easier in the tough times.

Positive Body Language

- ♦ Builds **closeness** and **trust**
- ♦ Sends signals without words

Consists of the following behaviours:

- S** face the other person **squarely**
- O** adopt an **open** posture
- L** **lean** slightly toward the other person
- D** at a **distance** apart of about 1 metre
- E** keep good **eye** contact
- R** try to be **relaxed**

Listening

Active listening is more than just hearing. It involves focussing on the message (content / intent) and your understanding of the message only.

Five good listening tips

- 1. Listen attentively**
All gestures and facial expressions should show acceptance and attention.
- 2. Listen reflectively**
Repeat what was said. The official, by restating in ordinary speech what the player said, is able to check that the content of the communication was understood. It also enables the official to check the feeling of the competitor's message was correctly interpreted.
- 3. Avoid emotional responses**
Have you ever noticed how listening stops when an exchange gets heated? Stay rational and not emotional.
- 4. Try bridging**
A nod of the head, a throaty noise without words or an occasional "yes" helps the listener to know you're tuned in.
- 5. Don't interrupt**
Don't interrupt means don't interrupt!

Strategies and techniques to improve communication

Improving communication

Like anything, interpersonal communication can be improved through practice. Use the following tips to improve your interpersonal communication skills.

- 1. Use feedback**
Two-way communication allows both sender and receiver to search for verbal and non-verbal cues (eyes, body movement, etc) in order to establish understanding.
- 2. Use face to face communication**
Accurate feedback is nearly always achieved more efficiently through face to face communication rather than over the telephone or through written means.
- 3. Be sensitive to the receiver's situation**
Individuals differ in their values, needs, attitudes and expectations. Empathising with those differences will improve our understanding of others and make it easier to communicate with them.
- 4. Use direct simple language**
The more accurately that words and phrases are tailored to the receiver's situation, the more effective the communication will be.

Communication Expectations at the First Class Level

All stakeholders in the game (Players, Media, Coaches, Managers, Administrators, Fellow Umpires, Scorers and Curators) expect that YOU can effectively communicate (ie. Get your message across and understand their messages).

Therefore, along with understanding and adopting the theory just covered, every representative umpire is expected to be able to effectively communicate across a number of mediums. (Apart from in person)

1. Via landline telephone
2. Via mobile phone
3. Via Internet (computer - email)
4. Via designated report forms (match reports, self assessments, code of conduct forms, over rate forms)
5. Via video links
6. Via training presentations and lectures

To be effective, communication (the message) also has to be **TIMELY** in order to have an impact and influence change. For the message to be received by YOU, it is necessary that you have access to all the above mediums and are able to operate them. It is also expected that you are able to respond to those messages within an appropriate time – not weeks, but days and hours. All umpires have to be able to effectively and communicate in a timely manner with key people interstate and overseas.