

3 COMMUNICATION

In the construction trades, workers and supervisors must constantly act and react to their changing environment. In doing so, they exchange facts, plans, and proposals. The one essential ingredient in all of these activities is communication.

Think for a moment of the types of communication common to worksites in construction:

- contracts
- blueprints
- safety talks
- health and safety committee minutes
- hand signals for hoisting and traffic control
- radio transmissions
- training sessions
- accident reports
- WSIB forms
- instructions to new workers
- specifications
- WHMIS labels and material safety data sheets
- regulations
- operating manuals.

All of these communications involve **messages** of different types being sent to and from **senders** and **receivers**.

These are the elements in the communications cycle, which consists of a sequence of steps. If any step is interfered with, blocked, or left incomplete the result will be miscommunication or no communication at all.

Step 1

Using his or her knowledge and experience, a "sender" creates a message in his or her mind.

Step 2

The message is "encoded." This means the message is put into speech for oral communication; into writing for written communication; or into signals or images for visual communication.

Step 3

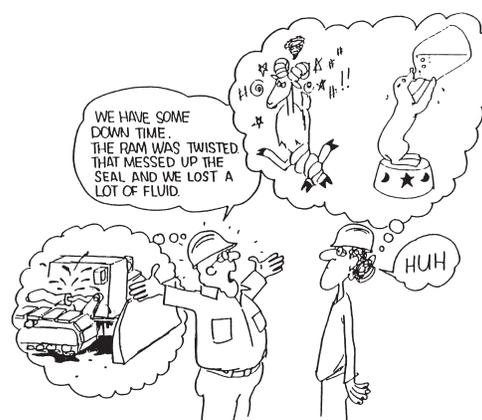
After encoding the message, the sender sends or "transmits" it. In verbal communication, the message is transmitted by speech. Written communications are delivered by hand, mail, FAX, or over a computer network. In visual communication, a signal is transmitted by hand, flag, pictures, or images.

Step 4

The "receiver" receives, that is, hears, reads, or sees the message.

Step 5

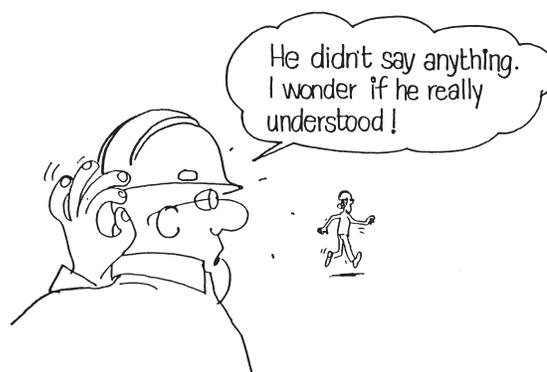
Using his or her own unique knowledge and experience, the receiver interprets the message.



Step 6

The receiver acknowledges that the message has been received and/or acts on the message. The full cycle has not been completed until the sender has some indication that

- a) the message has been received and
- b) action has resulted from the communication.



All the steps in the communication cycle are of equal importance. If you overlook or inadequately perform any of them, the result will be miscommunication or, in some cases, a complete lack of communication.

Understanding the communication cycle helps you to know when your message is not being received or is being misunderstood. By checking each step in the communication cycle you can see where you've gone wrong. This provides a practical framework for solving communications problems.

Remember — to communicate effectively you must make sure that the communication cycle is **complete** for every message you send. Each step in the cycle must be taken, and each completed, **every** time.

The following will ensure success in communication.

- Gather all the information you need before putting your message together.
- Organize your facts.
- Take the time to put together a message that makes sense and can be understood.
- Compose the message using words and/or visual aids the receiver can understand.
- Use a sending method (written, spoken, or visual) that will get the message across clearly.

- Take the receiver's ability to receive your message into account when choosing your method of transmission; be willing to change your choice if you discover a problem in communication.
- Take the receiver's ability to interpret your message into account when formulating your message.
- Check with the receiver to ensure that your message has been received and understood.
- Check results to ensure that your message has been properly acted upon.

Effective communications result when

- a message contains all the important details it should contain to be complete
- the message is delivered in a way which allows the receiver to receive it clearly, and
- the receiver understands the message completely and acts upon it properly.

To sum up, the three important elements of communications are

- message
- delivery method
- receiving method.

A message is complete when it contains all the information the receiver needs to understand and, if necessary, to act upon the message.

Try to include all the information necessary to answer any questions likely to arise in the mind of the receiver. One good way of doing this is to check whether the information covers

- who
- what
- when
- where
- why
- how.

Consider the following example.

"Hey! Make sure that pump is tagged and locked out."

This can raise all sorts of questions in the receiver's mind: "Who's supposed to make sure? Which pump? Where? How should it be locked out?"

On the other hand, consider a message like this.

"Hey Frank! (**Who**)

Before we begin, (**When**)

I want you to tag and lock out (**What #1**)

that pump (**What #2**)

in the washroom (**Where #1**)

up on the sixth floor. (**Where #2**)

We've got to be sure no one starts it while we're down here (**Why #1**)

or the place will be flooded. (**Why #2**)

Use the lockout procedure we went over yesterday."
(**How**)

The second message is more complete, leaves less room for error, and is therefore more effective.

Once a message is formed, the next step is delivery. There are three modes: verbal, written, and visual.

Verbal communication involves two or more people sending messages and expecting feedback. Lots of information can be exchanged in a short time.

With **written** communication, the cycle is generally slower. It takes time for the sender to compose the message, time to deliver it, time to read it, and time for the receiver to compose and send a reply. But written communication can produce results when verbal communication cannot.

Visual delivery includes such methods as hand signals to crane operators and signs for traffic control.

Receiving modes correspond to each of these delivery modes. Verbal messages are heard or, better, listened to. Written messages are read. Visual messages are seen.

All must be finally understood for the communication cycle to be complete.