



## *Communicating Internationally in English*

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How many times have you said something, thinking your message was clear, only to discover that your communication partner misinterpreted it? Why? Simply because we tend to process information differently and there are many variables at play when communication takes place. When we move away from face to face communication to the virtual world, things become even trickier. This informative book lists both the pitfalls and tips, along with useful phrases to use in the main business communication situations.

Good communicators make sure the other party gets the intended message. However, it is a two-way process and also depends on the other person – do they want to accommodate to our needs and how can we get past this if they do not?

Good communication means understanding the other person, sharing information and achieving a common goal. This book offers valuable and useful tips for learners of English as well as non-native English speakers. It is also useful for trainers, business English trainers and English native speakers to remind themselves of successful communication strategies in today's business environment. For example, motivation--how can we influence others or deal with conflict, etc.?

The book has seventeen chapters, divided into three sections: the basics, face to face skills and virtual skills. The first section on basics looks at speaking challenges and how to be a successful speaker. It also focuses on listening skills, how to become a better listener and the importance of non-verbal communication. The section also gives guidelines for native and non-native speakers, looks at managing situations with "difficult people," and ways of managing impatience.

"It is impossible to speak in such a way that you cannot be misunderstood" opens the first chapter on speaking. This quote by Karl Popper, Austro-British philosopher nicely sums up communication challenges. As soon as there are two people communicating, we need to adapt

to the situation. The authors suggest “the KISS strategy” – keep it short and simple, structured and several times repeated.

We can listen so as to motivate another by saying, for example “Tell me a little more about...” We tend to make judgments about others, usually based on our own cultural rules. But the key should be to suspend them. Native speakers tend to use idioms and speak too fast which can be quite frustrating for non-native speakers—no one would like to come across as stupid so I am likely to say “I understand” when I don’t. Check understanding and reword your message.

What about “difficult people”? This is a quick label for people who we see as hard to communicate with. Yet the problem may be in us. When someone challenges our worldview we can become defensive. We need to learn to be more receptive when others challenge us and see the good in challenging comments and discover in them ways to improve. These are learning opportunities. The authors suggest that we need to recognise our negative views, analyse their meaning, and adopt a positive communication strategy. According to them, impatience is a signal of intolerance. What kicks off our impatience? The answer we give to this question is an important clue about ourselves, as we are usually disturbed by people who behave the way we don’t, indicating a lack of something inside us. It is important to seek out the motivation and meaning behind another person’s message with questions like, “Why do you think this?” A framework for effective dialogue means that if things don’t go according to our plan, we should admit weakness and start learning from those who can really challenge us.

I found the book’s second section on face-to-face skills most useful for myself. It deals with relationship-building styles, relationships and gender, networking skills, how to manage conversations, what trust is and how to build it, how we can influence others, etc.

The third section addresses virtual skills that are becoming more and more important in today’s world. The chapters focus on email, telephoning, conference calls, etc. with a list of useful phrases in the “What do you say?” sections.

The book is mostly targeted at non-native speakers of English with an intermediate level of English or above. It is also useful for business English and communication trainers. However, native speakers can benefit from this book as well if they would like to improve their communication strategies, e.g. on how to communicate better with non-native speakers – there is always something to learn.

As the authors point out, our goal should be to communicate clearly and respectfully to others, taking into account others’ values and what is important to them as well. The authors point out that all communication is situational, so you need to adapt your message and the way you

communicate to each specific situation. The book gives guidelines and strategies for effective communication with examples of language for you to consider in the “What do you say?” sections at the end of most chapters. Culture is fuzzy and is made up of different layers, not only national but also for example organizational culture. The starting point for any cultural situation should be our own, i.e., how does my culture affect my communication and behavior with others? Do I get frustrated when there are last minute changes or am I flexible, etc.? There are also individual differences to consider.

I feel the book’s goal is not to give a ready-made recipe for use in any cultural situation as there were not many stories involving different backgrounds. We just need to have an open mind and learn from each experience.

The chapter on networking defines good networkers as people who are “memorable and engaging.” “They tell interesting stories and anecdotes with useful facts and figures. They show self-confidence. They provide info, insights and possible contacts that are useful in some way to the listener. They focus on things that the speaker and listener have in common. They communicate facts and feelings as a way of building openness and trust. Effective networkers are good at finishing conversations on a positive note.” In my view, this could also be said of good communicators.

Many of the chapters interact with readers by asking them to self-reflect on questions related to the topic at hand or analyze dialogues, etc. There could have been even more case studies and stories from real life. There is also a glossary of the main concepts at the end of the book.

It is a practical and easy to read book that is essential in today’s business world where we have native and non-native speakers working together in English.