

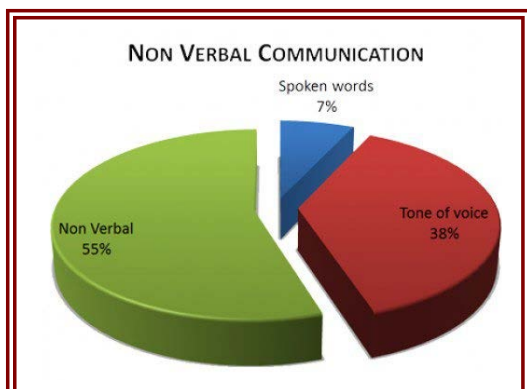
Communicating with your Apprentice: Are you speaking the same language?

For the next two years, you and your Apprentice will be working side by side through all kinds of challenges, not least of which is their own learning curve. How you communicate will influence how well you will work together and how much your Apprentice will learn from you. Getting off to a good start and setting a tone of clear and open communication is key to making the Apprenticeship relationship rewarding for you both.

Communication is more complicated than we think

Three features of communication are seldom considered in our everyday discussions with family and employees. But together, these three features influence how well we

communicate and how effectively that communication supports the functioning of your farm.



In a conversation, the words you speak sometimes are far less important than your **tone of voice and body language**. Some researchers suggest that, especially in sensitive or tense conversations, the spoken words amount to less than 10% of what is communicated. In other words, if you're mad, the non-verbal cues and tone of voice are going to override what you say, no matter how nice you're trying to be.

The second feature is the **"communication cascade"** that happens every time a person opens their mouth to speak. Did it come out right? Did you say what you meant? What did your listener hear? And how

did they understand it? Did they truly listen to what you said and do they accept it? Will they remember and act on what you said? As you can see, only part of this cascade is under your control, so it's important to take a deliberate approach to communicating with your Apprentice and set some ground rules from the very beginning to guide you. The rest of this tip sheet provides some ideas.

Listening is one of the most significant parts of any conversation. There is no skill more important for effective communication than listening. It's what allows us to consider the other person's perspective and to find common ground. A good listener:

- ❖ Focuses on what is being said and tunes out distractions.
- ❖ Is open to hearing what the other is saying, even if it contradicts one's position.
- ❖ Looks for non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expressions or body postures to increase understanding.
- ❖ Hears the other person out and refrains from forming a response before they're finished talking.
- ❖ Clarifies and asks questions to help you understand what is being said.
- ❖ Restates the other's comments, telling them, in so many words, that you have heard and understand them.
- ❖ Tries to understand the other's comments from their perspective.
- ❖ Is willing to adapt one's position based on the other's perspective.

What you wanted to say

What you said

What the person heard

What the person understood

What the person listened to

What the person accepted

What the person remembers

Tips for Communicating Effectively

Throughout the Apprenticeship, and especially in the first few weeks and months, you will have many teaching sessions with your Apprentice as they learn the chores on your farm. They will have questions and they will make mistakes. The teaching scenario in the box at the right is one of many teaching conversations you will have. Consider the following tips as you coach your Apprentice through learning a new skill:

- Use "I" statements. Using personal pronouns when speaking contributes to direct communication.
 - Say: "I feel frustrated when you don't get here in time to start milking"
 - Not: "You never get to work on time".
- Describe behaviors without a value judgment.
 - Say: "You seemed very interested when I was talking to the dairy plant field rep."
 - Not: "You always interrupt when I'm talking to someone."
- Describe your feelings: you can't always hide the fact that the emotional content is directly coloring your message.
 - Say: "I felt angry when you broke the chop gate."
 - Or, minimize communication about a subject when you're angry. Give yourself a chance to cool off and formulate a rational response.
- Maintain congruence between your verbal and non-verbal messages.
 - Saying, "You really did a great job on that.." with your eyes rolling or a sarcastic tone, will confuse the person and decrease trust which closes down open communication.
- Be specific when giving negative feedback.
 - Say: "It's important to always use a fresh paper towel on each udder and this is why..."
 - Not: "I really have a problem with the way you do udder prep."
- Use the 'feedback sandwich' technique. Start with praise, share areas where improvement is needed, end on a positive note.
 - Say: "Your teat dipping is nice and thorough. One thing you can work on is remembering to always use a fresh paper towel on each udder and this is why... Overall, your udder prep process is looking great."
- Give the Apprentice a chance to respond to your feedback. They may have a reason why they did things the way they did, or may need more instruction to fully understand.
- Keep in mind that everyone needs practice to become an effective communicator, including you.
 - Ask for feedback around the clarity, delivery, and timing of your message.

Teaching how to milk

Start with an overview:

- Describe the steps of the procedure.
- Explain the "why" for udder preparation:
 - To avoid milk contamination (including quality premiums)
 - To avoid mastitis causing bacteria entering the udder
 - To stimulate let-down; explain Oxytocin, it's antagonist Adrenalin, its duration in the blood stream.

Demonstrate each step:

- Pre-and/or post dipping. Explain importance of task being done correctly: complete teat coverage, etc. Let Apprentice practice.
- Stripping and wiping. Again explain details and why: single towels, use of different places on the towels for each teat etc. Show different techniques on how to get milk out of the udder.
- Attachment of the milking cluster. Show proper attachment of milking cluster, i.e. not sucking air, and whatever else is unique about your particular cluster
- Reattachment. Next explain under what conditions to reattach an automatic take-off (if applicable). Without take-offs, explain when milking is considered finished and how to properly take off the cluster, i.e. shut off vacuum first, wait a second to let out vacuum, remove.

Practice

- Continue milking with apprentice until he/she is comfortable and proficient with all tasks before leaving them on their own.
- How quickly apprentices learn this and other processes/techniques varies greatly. It could be a couple milkings or a couple weeks. Adjust your teaching style to the apprentice's learning