Interpersonal Communication Essay, Research Paper

Interpersonal communication plays a huge role in our everyday lives. The interaction between two people or a small group is a prime example of interpersonal communication. We partake in interpersonal communication in almost every situation we encounter through out our day. At school, work, or social gatherings interpersonal communication is being used without thought.

Communication helps us define our perception of others as well as our own self- perception, self-concept, and self-esteem. If we can successfully communicate with others it helps build a positive image of ourselves knowing that we can communicate our thoughts and ideas to another person clearly and meaningfully. If others cannot communicate clearly and meaningfully it has a poor effect on our perception of them. Our self-concept or mental image we have of ourselves is shaped by the responses we receive from those we communicate with. If our communication skills are perceived and responded to in a positive way this boosts our self-concept in turn boosting our self-esteem. The same goes for the negative perceptions people may have of us. These negative responses can be detrimental to our self-concept and self-esteem. People that don’t have good perception skills may have the opposite of reality when it comes to how people perceive them.

Interpersonal communication also has a large impact on how we perceive others. How others look in the physical aspect play a major role in our perception of them. Their manor of dress and the way they carry themselves are two important things that lead us to our initial perception of that person. This factors in to a person’s social behavior. A person’s style and or mannerisms sometimes bring out social behavior. These things may cause a person to be perceived as nice, funny, rude, or shy. These perceptions that are made are usually judgmental and often are founded by stereotypes, the time of the interaction, the emotional state of the person or persons as well as cultural or gender differences. This is why it is not always wise to judge a book by its cover.

Verbal communication is the most widely used form of communication in the world. The use of verbal communication or language is sometimes the best way to express our ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Language barriers can cause problems in cross-cultural exchanges due to the fact that it is so necessary. We use language to define, discuss, explain, and survive. Not only do we need to worry about cross cultural exchanges but also subgroups in out own culture. The use of the same words or variations of the same words (slang) can leave someone with the wrong idea or completely lost and confused. There has been associations made to differences in language use between genders.

Nonverbal communication is as big of a factor in interpersonal communication as verbal communication. These nonverbal actions that a usually interpreted as intentional include; bodily and hand actions, vocal qualities, and facial expressions. These motions vary by culture and can convey a message without words. A person’s posture, facial expression, gestures, and the amount of eye contact they use can control the flow of a conversation. These small and sometimes subconscious gestures can show feelings, or illustrate what a person is really saying. These motions are perceived differently by culture and gender.

Paralanguage is a subsection of nonverbal communication. This has to do with the sound of what has been said. A person’s vocal characteristics are a type of paralanguage. Some of the characteristics of paralanguage are; pitch, the highness or lowness of tone, volume the loudness or softness of tone, the speed of speech, and the clarity due to overtones in one’s voice. Paralanguage also covers the flow or lack there of in one’s speech. The lack of flow due to vocal interferences such as words or sounds like, “um”, “uh”, “well”, and “hmm” are included under paralanguage.

Self-presentation is also under nonverbal communication. Style does play a factor in this as well. A person’s style of dress may cause them to be categorized with a particular group of people. A person’s personal grooming skills also communicate a specific message in certain situations. There a times and places where one must dress accordingly. A person’s manner of dress might drastically vary from their place of employment to a social gathering with friends. Where a casual manner of dress mat suffice among friends it will most likely not be appropriate in the office. The way we look and dress can also effect our confidence level in a situation. If a person is dressed neatly and is well poised the may have more confidence in themselves. When this confidence is there is can be noticed when they communicate with a person or group. Their confidence or lack of confidence can determine the message a person puts forth. Other things that make impressions in self-presentation are time and touch. Timing can be everything. The amount of times it takes to convey a message or to complete an activity is very important in presenting your self. Being prompt and on time for scheduled events is also an important aspect to think about. By being punctual shows that you are serious, courteous, and dependable. These are things people look for in employees and friends. Touch is something one must be weary of using in the wrong way. People may interact and touch family and close friends in ways that could be considered unacceptable in the work place. Touch is also perceived differently among different cultures. What may be widely excepted in the U.S. may not be acceptable in other countries. These self-presentation standards much like paralanguage differ between culture and gender.

Self-disclosure or the sharing of biographical data, personal ideas, and feelings can be a somewhat dangerous part of interpersonal communication, if you don’t know the guidelines. The amount of information we disclose to the listener depends on the situation and relationship we have with the person. This is what the guidelines for self-disclosure are based on. These guidelines a fairly simple: disclose information that you want others to disclose to you, begin disclosing more personal information when you think that it represents an acceptable risk, only continue to disclose personal information if it is reciprocated, make the disclosures more and more personal slowly, reserve extremely personal disclosures for ongoing close relationships. Culture and gender play a part in this aspect of interpersonal communication just like all the others. In some cultures it is rude to ask a person to disclose information about them selves at all. They feel if they want you to know they will tell you. Americans tend to disclose more information that most other countries. When it comes to gender woman tend to disclose more information than men do. Self-disclosure can be very informal or very personal the important thing to know is when to make one or the other.

Listening is an essential part of interpersonal communication. To be an effective listener one must focus on the person speaking. You must physically and mentally prepare to listen to someone. When effectively listening to someone speak you let them finish their sentences without cutting them off or reacting before hearing them out. You must also clear your mind and not prejudge or look to sabotage a person while they speak. To do these things you must adjust to the listening goals of the situation.

Understanding a message and being able to decode the information is also an important part of listening. To be a good listener three techniques can be used to better understand what the speaker is saying. Empathizing with the point of the speaker by understanding and identifying with the thoughts feelings and ideas they have is one technique. This technique is also used for support and comforting the speaker. Questioning is also used for clarification of what was said or to gain more information. Questioning is a listening technique that is sometimes not used enough and if it is use it is used in the wrong way. When questioning a speaker you don’t want to sound as if you are challenging them or mocking them unless under the proper circumstances. Paraphrasing is the third technique. Paraphrasing is when the listener repeats the speaker’s statement in their own words to clarify their understanding. By using these techniques one can become a better listener and in turn a better speaker.

Communication in interpersonal relationships is an absolute must, if there is no communication the relationship cannot grow or deepen. No madder what type of relationship it maybe acquaintances, friends, best friends, or intimate the communication is what made it what it is. The amount and type of communication is what makes the relationship. There are different levels of trust, interaction, disclosure, and comfort in these relationships. To build a relationship you must go through three steps. Striking up conversation, keeping the conversation going, then depending on the conversation and how well you communicate with each other the choice of moving to deep friendship and or intimacy levels. Starting a relationship comes, as second nature to most of us but that isn’t the hard part. Stabilizing and keeping a relationship is much harder to do. To stabilize a relationship you must speak openly, provisionally, descriptively, and while doing this treat the other person as an equal. If you don’t conflict is sure to come about.

Communicating during conflict is very important when it comes to maintaining a relationship. There are many ways people deal with conflict; force, accommodation, compromise, collaboration, or withdrawal. Responding to conflict appropriately and effectively, managing conflict, and knowing how and when to initiate conflict are all-important skills to have in the communication process.

Interpersonal communication involves many areas that require one to understand the techniques that are used to effectively communicate with others. By learning more about these areas we can learn how to use these techniques in the relationships in our own lives. In doing this we can build stronger relationships that can bring us more satisfaction within ourselves.