

Understanding Communication Barriers

*Effectively Communicating Across
All Departments*

Sheri Vegso
WRTG 394
Professor Taylor
August 14, 20XX

Table of Contents

I. Letter of Transmittal	3
II. Summary.....	4
III. Introduction.....	4
IV. The Proof is in the Pudding.....	4
V. Recommendations and next action steps.....	5
VI. Conclusion.....	8
VII. References.....	10

Letter of Transmittal

To: Chrystie Obie
Senior Vice President
L'Oreal USA

From: Sheri Vegso
HR Manager
L'Oreal USA

Subject: Final Draft "Understanding Communication Barriers"

Date: August 16, 2007

On behalf of the L'Oreal HR department, I am pleased to present to you the work authorized in your July 11, 2007, memorandum: "Understanding Communication Barriers."

We trust that the Executive team will be very interested in the correlation between employee stress and poor communication. We are confident that management will recognize the urgency to train employees on effective communication and quickly implement the new communication policies.

The HR team will be happy to meet with management to respond to any questions they have.

Thank you for your help and guidance on this project.

I. Summary

The communication revolution in the 1970's has changed the face of how we conduct business today. Communication technology allows us to send messages via fax or email within seconds. Business documents and presentations changed from the drab black text on white paper to impressive masterpieces complete with colorful visual aids (Bell & Smith, 2006, p. 6). Meetings are now being held via video-conference so workers no longer have to waste time traveling. With all the real time communication today, so many messages are trying to be communicated and not many people have the time designated to address or comprehend each message they receive appropriately.

“With all the real time communication today, so many messages are trying to be communicated and not many people have the time designated to address or comprehend each message they receive appropriately.”

Companies who have provided communication training to their employees have shown significant progress in customer relations and internal communication. After the employees attended training they had the tools to properly identify their audience and cater their correspondence to their readers. To improve the overall clarity of their messages, employees learned how to identify communication barriers and were shown tips on how to avoid them. Companies who have invested in communication training have increased sales and reduced costly mistakes thereby contributing to the overall success of the company. Below are the areas in which companies have seen improvement after their employees received training:

- ✓ **Fewer mistakes:** Tasks assigned to employees are now communicated clearly and employees execute the task error free.
- ✓ **High Productivity:** Less mistake equate to higher productivity. Employees no longer waste time correcting mistakes. Instead tasks are done correctly the first time.
- ✓ **Improved Morale:** Employees feel less stressed and have more time to complete their daily duties. Also working relationships have improved and employees are working collectively as a team.
- ✓ **Increased Profits:** Effective communication has rendered fewer mistakes and improved productivity. As a result companies have seen increased profits.

II. Introduction

L'Oreal employees receive an average of one hundred emails daily. Without the proper communication training, it is no surprise that employees cut corners and display communication barriers when sending emails. For example, certain L'Oreal departments demonstrate language barriers and use internal jargon or abbreviations when compiling an email. According to Hahn (2005), “To understand one another, you and your receiver must share similar meanings for words, gestures, tone of voice, and other symbols” (p. 1)

When an author uses jargon or abbreviations it prevents the reader from fully understanding the message, especially if the message is sent to people outside the authors department. For example, if the shipping department sent an internal email to customer service and requested a POD, the customer service person may not know that POD stands for proof of delivery. If the abbreviation is not familiar to the person, they have to spend additional time dissecting its' meaning. Or even worse, the customer service person may disregard the message all together and nothing gets accomplished.

Another way employees try to save time is by addressing more then one person in a single email message. When an author constructs emails in this format, the receiver has to read through the entire message to locate the small portion that pertains to them. Consequently, the receiver may skim the email because of its lengthy format and miss something important.

Below is an example of an email correspondence that demonstrates language barriers and addresses multiple people within the organization.

From: Randle, Cabretta
 Sent: Wednesday, August 08, 2007 2:30 PM
 To: CHMIELOWIEC, Melanie; Vegso, Sheri; Giancaspro, Joanne
 Cc: Conant, Linda; KUNREUTHER Jackie; Klauk, Erin; Sanchez, Richard
 Subject: RE: December Preference (DPM# 4183)

Sheri:

The Target Team has confirmed they need new B2S sticker graphics for the above DPM.

Pls issue a new component code to Erin so once new art approved, it can be released asap.

Erin:

Pls initiate a Green Folder asap. JoJo is reviewing B2S designs w/KR tomorrow to hopefully provide you readers f/routing by eod, tomorrow (JoJo: pls confirm).

Melanie:

Per our discussion yesterday, the Preference B2S sticker order date is 8/15/07. Art must release to Assembly **NLT** 8/13 so it can be provided to the Supplier along w/the PO on 8/15.

Pls know new art will require proof submission and approval by Ctv, Mktg and Cust Mktg.

The slightest delay in art release and/or proof approval, will impact the label delivery and thus Assembly's production schedule.

Our assembly schedule is very tight w/no opportunity to adjust jobs at the last minute so any delays will impact your shipdate.

Pls advise any questions, Cabretta

Notice: The author uses abbreviations and departmental jargon. This could easily be misinterpreted.

Notice: The email is addressed to three different people. Readers have to search for the portion that pertains to them.

III. The Proof is in the Pudding

To capture the importance of effective communication, a survey was distributed amongst twenty employees, from various departments. The survey consisted of three email examples which the participants were asked to rank from one to ten, (one being the lowest) based upon the clarity of

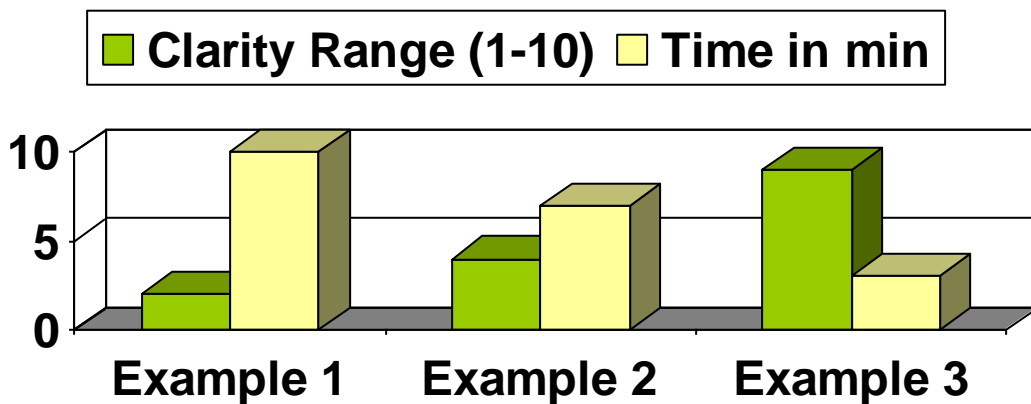
each message. Participants were also asked to log the time spent trying to comprehend the email. After the survey was completed the facilitator met with the participants requesting their feedback on the format and clarity of each example.

Example one: included language barriers such as abbreviations and terminology specific to the authors department.

Example two: the author addressed multiple people within one email message.

Example three: the author did not use abbreviation and or jargon nor did they address multiple recipients.

The below chart shows the average degree of clarity and time spent analyzing each example.



The results from the first example averaged a ranking of two for overall clarity and it took an average of ten minutes for readers to comprehend the message. This example proved to be the most complex and time consuming, proving that language barriers seriously hinders the readers’ ability to understand the message.

Example #1 Participant Feedback:

- Participants thought the email terminology and abbreviations used were ambiguous.
- Even after ten minutes readers still did not fully understand the message and eventually gave up, moving onto to Question #2.

Readers felt the second example was clearer therefore they needed less time to comprehend the message. The second example averaged a ranking of four for overall clarity and it took an average of 7 minutes to read and understand.

Example #2 Participant Feedback:

- The body of the email was too long.
- The terminology was clear but there was too much information in one message.
- The reader was confused about the author’s target audience.

The last example's rankings were the highest in clarity and lowest in time spent identifying the message. The reader gave the third question an average rank of nine for clarity and they spent, on average three minutes to understand the email.

Example #3 Participant Feedback:

- The terminology was simple and clear.
- The format of the email was easy to follow.
- Overall the readers found this example to be the most efficient format.

IV. Recommendations and Next Action Steps

L'Oreal managers recognize that something needs to be done to improve the flow of communication which will relieve employees of stress. Improper communication has caused unnecessary and sometimes costly mistakes within the organization. In order to rectify the situation employees were forced to spend more time on projects than necessary impeding workflow and causing additional stress.

Now that L'Oreal managers are aware of the dangers posed by ill communication, what are the next steps? The answer is training.

One type of training managers should introduce is audience analysis. This training should teach employees about the following four types of audiences:

- **Experts:** These individuals thoroughly know the product since they were the ones to design it. Communicating to them is fairly simple since they have extensive knowledge of the subject ("Tech Writing, 2007).
- **Technicians:** The members of this group maintain the products integrity. They are the ones to assemble and or repair the product. Although their knowledge is highly technical, they do not have the same broad knowledge as an expert. Therefore communication regarding any subject outside their realm should be detailed (Tech Writing, 2007).
- **Executives:** These people are the ones who make business decisions. They are the ones who decided if the company is going to embrace a new product and determine how to market it. Executives have little knowledge of the product's design or technicality. Communication to them needs to be detailed and clear (Tech Writing, 2007).
- **Nonspecialist:** Out of all the different audiences these members have the least knowledge. When communicating to nonspecialist, the author should assume the individual has no knowledge of the subject; therefore, the message should be very detailed (Tech Writing 2007).

Employees should also learn the importance of identifying their audience's characteristics. An audience could be characterized by their experience, needs, demographic or size (Hahn, 2005). For example if one was addressing a group of high school students then the correspondence should be of a high school level. If the correspondence was more scholarly then they may not understand everything trying to be communicated ("Writing Guides" 2007). This will help employees properly identify their audience's needs.

In addition to audience analysis training, employees should also be trained on communication barriers. Communication barriers interrupt the natural flow of an email which is distracting to the reader (Bell & Smith, 2006, p. 32). Often if the reader is distracted then they lose their focus making it difficult for them to understand the message. Below are the different types of communication barriers L'Oreal on which employees should be trained on:

- **Noise:** Noise could either be real or semantic. Real noise is loud music or someone clapping their hands. Semantic noise refers to distractions within a writer or speakers message.
- **Physical Barriers:** Physical Barriers such as the office being too cold or hot can make an audience hostile or lethargic. Memos that are too long or have abnormal fonts can distract the audience as well.
- **Emotional Barriers:** Emotional communication yields emotional reactions. When the sender writes in bold or raises his or her voice, the receiver concentrates on his or her emotion rather than the actual message being sent.
- **Linguistic Barriers:** The sender chooses vocabulary that is beyond his or her audience and the message is not clearly received. To be an effective communicator, one must use vocabulary that is appropriate for the audience.
- **Nonverbal Barriers:** Nonverbal barriers are not spoken or written but communicated through body language. For example, rolling one eyes is sending a message of annoyance.

After training, employees will not only recognize the different types of communication barriers but they will learn how to avoid using them as well. The training will include methods to approaching or responding to a message that contains communication barriers. For example, employees will be taught to wait ten minutes before responding to an email that exhibits emotional barriers. This will allow enough time to pass so that the employee can move past the barrier and respond rationally.

Lastly after the employees receive training it is the manager's responsibility to enforce the new communication methods. This is the most important step of the action plan. If L'Oreal invests in training and it is not implemented in the work place, the plan will not be successful. Therefore if an employee does not utilize their new skills it is imperative that the manager works with that person to ensure they understand the requirements of the new communication methods.

V. Conclusion

Good communication skills are the most important tool employees can possess hence communication training is an investment to the company. A message that includes communication barriers or addresses multiple parties not only confuses the reader but could cause the company to suffer costly mistakes. If we equip our employees with the proper communication tools we could increase productivity and reduce the time wasted correcting errors caused by poor communiqué. Eventually managers will be moving into higher positions and it is important to mold our employees into great communicators so that they, too, could move forward within the company.

As the famous biologist Charles Darwin once said “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” Evidentially the technology of communication is evolving therefore we must evolve with it to survive.

References

- Bell, A and Smith, D. (2006). *Management Communication, 2nd edition*. City, ST: John Wiley & Son Publishing.
- Flower, L. (1985). Writing reader-based prose. In *Problem-solving strategies for writing* (pp. 159-181). San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishing.
- Hahn, Martin. (2005, December 29). Overcoming Communication Barriers Between People. *EzineArticles*. Retrieved August 05, 2007, from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Overcoming-Communication-Barriers-Between-People&id=119628>
- J. Wesley (personal communication, interview, August 5, 2007)
Jennifer Wesley is a customer service representative and was a participant of the communication survey. She provided constructive feedback on the format and clarity of the email example.
- L. Gavas (personal communication, interview, August 5, 2007)
Linda Gavas schedules production and was a participant of the communication survey. She provided constructive feedback on the format and clarity of the email example.
- Online Technical Writing: Audience Analysis*. (n.d.) Retrieved August 5, 2007, from <http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/aud.html>
- Writing Guides: Audience. (n.d.) Retrieved August 5, 2007, from <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/processes/audmod/printformat.cfm?printformat=yes>

Communication Survey

Example #1

From: Randle, Cabretta
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2007 4:21 PM
To: Sanchez, Richard; Hart, Judy
Cc: Zagariello, Mike
Subject: FW: White Kids bottles
Importance: High

Hi Guys:

Pls see attached DIF f/a new Kids promotion (sim to AbriKIDabra) shipping 2/1/08. Current qty estimates are 1,000,000 pcs across 4 flavors going into SK's and EAT's. As this may be handled by Crescent Park, pls review attached TT and advise POV.

Thanks, Cabretta

- 1) From a range from 1-10, 1 being the lowest how would you rank the overall clarity of this message?
- 2) How much time did you spend reading and comprehending this email?

Example #2

From: Randle, Cabretta
 Sent: Monday, August 13, 2007 3:16 PM
 To: Vegso, Sheri; Sanchez, Richard; Purcell, Christopher
 Subject: FW: Sticker? ~ Target Preference Buy 2 and Save (Job# 4183)

Sheri/Richy:
 FYI ~ please note the below changes requested by Customer Marketing.
 Once they release new art we will advise their ship date.

Chris:
 Please advise if our machinery has any size limitations for the violator sticker. Target's next program is the Excellence Buy 2 and Save shipping in May so if you have any issue let me know..

Cabs

- 1) From a range from 1-10, 1 being the lowest how would you rank the overall clarity of this message?
- 2) How much time did you spend reading and comprehending this email?

Example #3

From: Purcell, Christopher
 Sent: Wednesday, July 18, 2007 11:05 AM
 To: Randle, Cabretta; Vegso, Sheri
 Cc: GAVAS Linda; Sanchez, Richard; Conant, Linda
 Subject: RE: Costco/Sams Blister Cards

Hey Cabs,

Just to give you a heads up we may run into a small issue. We were testing the new machine yesterday I ran into some sealing problems with the card.

1. Some cards may be old and the glue may be dried up
2. The truck ride from Indiana to NJ in the dead of summer may have cased the cards to activate some of the heat sensitive material.

Any case the sealing consistency and the quality of printing on the cards is in question. We can review more on Friday when I get back.

- 1) From a range from 1-10, 1 being the lowest how would you rank the overall clarity of this message?
- 2) How much time did you spend reading and comprehending this email?

Survey Results

Example #1

																					Average
Clarity	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	1	2	2
Time	10	10	8	9	10	10	9	10	10	9	10	8	10	10	10	8	8	10	9	9	10

Example #2

																						Average
Clarity	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Time	6	6	6	8	8	7	7	7	8	7	6	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	6	6	6	7

Example #3

																						Average
Clarity	8	9	10	9	9	9	9	9	10	8	9	9	9	9	8	8	10	10	9	9	9	9
Time	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	4	3	4	3	3

