

## Communications 201: the Art and Science of Effective Communication

Just because you know how to talk doesn't mean you know how to communicate. Miscommunication can be funny; we see it everywhere, from standup to rom-coms. But other times, it's not so funny: miscommunication can undermine relationships both personal and professional, ruin careers and reputations, and breed cultures of mistrust. Those things are bad enough when they're the result of intentional actions, but they're even worse when they're rooted in miscommunications that could have been avoided.



At Smooth Sailing Solutions, our modular workshops work effectively in a series or as stand-alone trainings. In *Communications 201: The Art and Science of Effective Communication*, we move past the basics of interpersonal interactions (empathy and listening) and deep into the mechanics of how one person conveys meaning to another—whether they mean to, or not.

We start by differentiating between sources of information, between the words we say and their meanings, versus all the other things we're *not* saying but are subconsciously perceived anyway. When metamesages conflict with explicit verbal messages, the powers of perception and emotion win out over logic and language every time.

These conversational mechanisms—different combinations and applications of pitch, volume, and pace—are largely subconscious speech patterns that vary greatly by region, age, gender, race, and more. The ways they're interpreted *also* vary; being able to account for and leverage these patterns in speech and perception make us all better able to communicate with intent.

Just as there are different combinations of conversational mechanisms, there are different conversational styles and strategies that people use to define their re-

lationships in real time. To be an effective leader, it's important to understand that the way you communicate may not work for the person you're trying to reach. We teach participants how to identify different conversational styles, and how to use different strategies to adapt their own styles to those of others and inspire confidence and trust.

While we teach these skills “for Good,” there are people in the world who use these tactics for less admirable purposes. Our workshops help participants understand how to spot intentional manipulation by breaking down power

dynamics in talk in a play-by-play fashion. Of course, not all people who reframe conversations mean to have the effect that they do; this, too, is a common source of misunderstanding. Communication isn't about what you say, but rather what the other person hears: when participants learn to be more discerning speakers and listeners, everyone is better equipped to have more productive—and more honest—conversations.

### Read Your Lines

One of the activities in *Communications 201* is called *Read Your Lines*. This activity leverages the lack of visual and aural metamessaging in written communication to demonstrate how much variance exists in how we speak, as well as how we hear. Participants will be presented with notecards with different phrases on them, all without capitalization or punctuation.

In small groups, pairs, or as one large group (depending on the workshop size and structure), they will take turns saying the same phrase in different ways, applying different combinations of pitch, pace, and volume. We'll reflect on how differently things sound, as well as the ambiguity of written text and why, because of that, it's important to have difficult conversations in person.