

Communication Skills for Leaders

Delivering a clear and consistent message

Fourth Edition

Bert Decker

A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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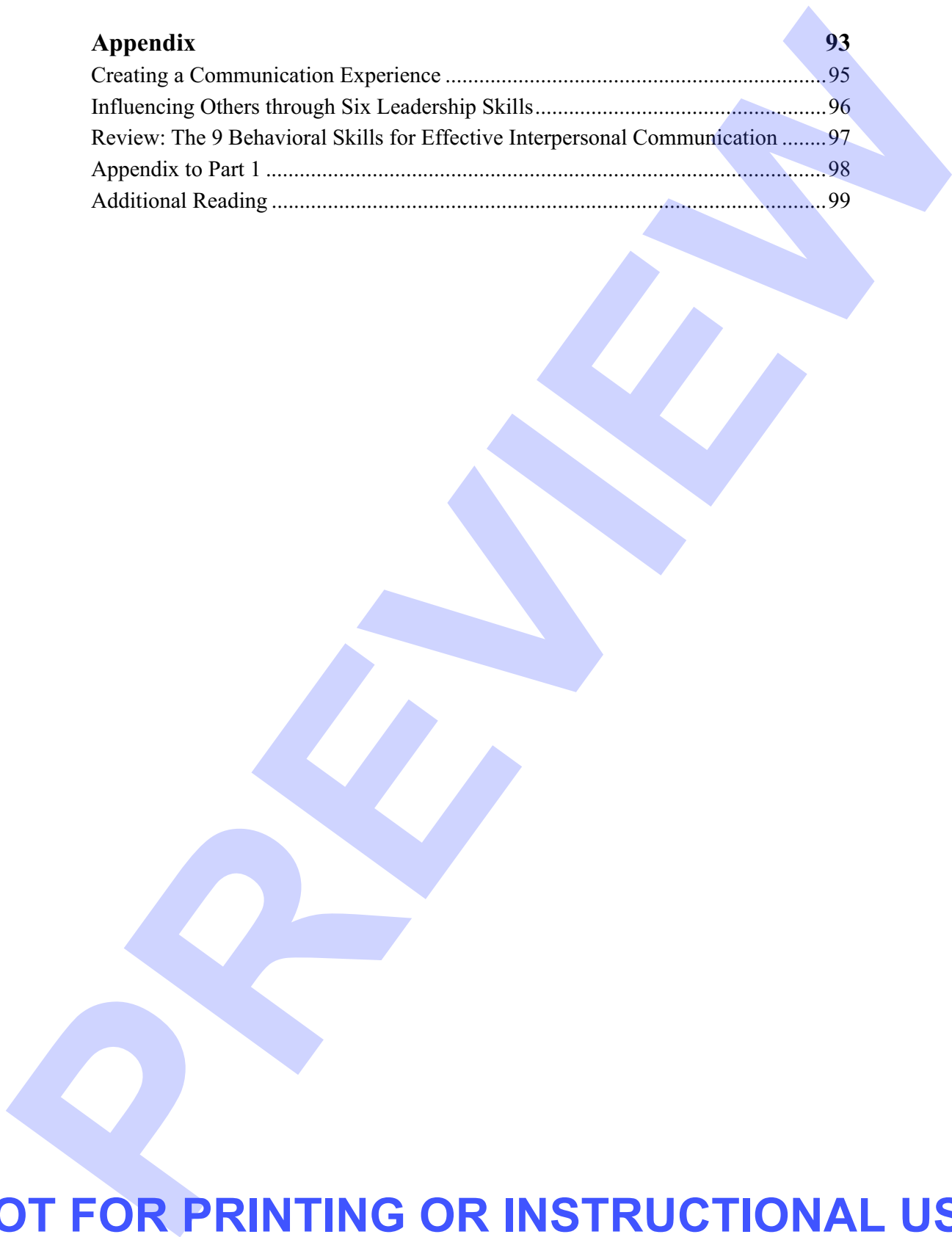
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About the Author

Bert Decker is a nationally recognized communications expert. The company he founded, Decker Communications, Inc., has been training hundreds of thousands of people for decades, recognized for over 20 years as one of the leading communications training companies.

Decker Communications provides communications consulting and skill building to more than 400 major organizations. The Decker Method™ is recognized as the best in its field for enhancing communication performance.

Bert Decker has also written the groundbreaking book, *You've Got To Be Believed To Be Heard*, has appeared on the NBC Today show several times as its communications expert, commenting on the U.S. presidential debates, and he authors the *Create Your Communications Experience* blog at www.bertdecker.com.

Communication Skills for Leaders is based on the Decker Method™ and may be used effectively with the popular book *Creating Messages That Motivate* on the Decker Grid™, available through Decker Communications and at www.deckercommunications.com. Decker Communications, Inc. is headquartered at 575 Market Street, Suite 1925, San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 543-8100.

Preface

Christine Figari was a trainer with Decker Communications for nearly two decades. She first called me when the company was only a couple of years old and quite a bit leaner than it is today. “We’re really not hiring new trainers right now,” I said, “but go ahead and send your resume. We’re always looking for good people.”

I was working in my office the next day when our receptionist brought in Christine’s resume and said, “I told her you wouldn’t be able to talk to her without an appointment, but she insists on seeing you in person.”

I scanned the resume and saw that it was good, but not spectacular. I thought this was a little pushy, but figured I ought to be friendly at least, so I walked down the hall. I found Christine to be much more impressive than her resume.

What really struck me was her certainty—energetic voice and manner, great posture, and authentic smile. She radiated confidence and competence. I learned more of what I needed to know about Chris within the first 30 seconds after we shook hands than from her entire resume.

We ended up talking for half an hour. Two months later, I hired her.

The point of this story is that personal impact *does* make a difference. Effective communication is critical in work and at play. It’s particularly important to your professional effectiveness because of today’s increasingly competitive environment.

This new edition of *Communication Skills for Leaders* explains the communication-leadership connection and includes updated examples to guide you in learning effective communication techniques.

Achieving excellence in interpersonal communications is a complex process made up of nine basic skills, which are presented in this book. You’ll learn why each is important and will be able to practice the skills through a variety of exercises, assessments, checklists, and self-tests. You’ll find yourself using your newfound skills dozens of times a day—both in business and in your personal life.

Many of the ideas are commonsense. Some are new. Most important, they all work. They’ve been tested and proven by hundreds of thousands of business executives, managers, and salespeople who’ve participated in the Decker Communications Communicate to Influence™ training programs.

Communicating is a learnable skill. It takes work, but the results are worth it. With practice, you can raise this skill to an art form and even enjoy the process.

Good luck!



Bert Decker

Learning Objectives

Complete this book, and you'll know how to:

- 1) Use the keys to effective interpersonal communication: Believability and the 9 Behavioral Skills of Communication.
- 2) Develop Connection with your listeners via the behavioral skill of Eye Communication.
- 3) Develop energy in your interpersonal communication via the behavioral skills of Posture and Movement, Gestures and Facial Expressions, and Voice and Vocal Variety.
- 4) Develop credibility in your interpersonal communication via the behavioral skills of Dress and Appearance and Language, Nonwords, and Pauses.
- 5) Develop interaction with your audience via the behavioral skills of Listener Involvement, Humor, and the Natural Self.

Workplace and Management Competencies mapping

For over 30 years, business and industry has utilized competency models to select employees. The trend to use competency-based approaches in education and training, assessment, and development of workers has experienced a more recent emergence within the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), a division of the United States Department of Labor.

The ETA's General Competency Model Framework spans a wide array of competencies from the more basic competencies, such as reading and writing, to more advanced occupation-specific competencies. The Crisp Series finds its home in what the ETA refers to as the Workplace Competencies and the Management Competencies.

Communication Skills for Leaders covers information vital to mastering the following competencies:

Workplace Competencies:

- ▶ Adaptability & Flexibility

Management Competencies:

- ▶ Informing
- ▶ Clarifying Roles & Objectives

For a comprehensive mapping of Crisp Series titles to the Workplace and Management Competencies, visit www.CrispSeries.com.

About the Crisp 50-Minute Series

The Crisp 50-Minute Series is designed to cover critical business and professional development topics in the shortest possible time. Our easy-to-read, easy-to-understand format can be used for self-study or for classroom training. With a wealth of hands-on exercises, the 50-Minute books keep you engaged and help you retain critical skills.

What You Need to Know

We designed the Crisp 50-Minute Series to be as self-explanatory as possible. But there are a few things you should know before you begin the book.

Exercises

Exercises look like this:



EXERCISE TITLE

Questions and other information would be here.

Keep a pencil handy. Any time you see an exercise, you should try to complete it. If the exercise has specific answers, an answer key is provided in the appendix. (Some exercises ask you to think about your own opinions or situation; these types of exercises don't have answer keys.)

Forms

A heading like this means that the rest of the page is a form:

FORMHEAD

Forms are meant to be reusable. You might want to make a photocopy of a form before you fill it out, so that you can use it again later.

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A Note to Instructors

We've tried to make the Crisp 50-Minute Series books as useful as possible as classroom training manuals. Here are some of the features we provide for instructors:

- ▶ PowerPoint presentations
- ▶ Answer keys
- ▶ Assessments
- ▶ Customization

PowerPoint Presentations

You can download a PowerPoint presentation for this book from our Web site at www.CrispSeries.com.

Answer keys

If an exercise has specific answers, an answer key will be provided in the appendix. (Some exercises ask you to think about your own opinions or situation; these types of exercises will not have answer keys.)

Assessments

For each 50-Minute Series book, we have developed a 35- to 50-item assessment. The assessment for this book is available at www.CrispSeries.com. *Assessments should not be used in any employee-selection process.*

Customization

Crisp books can be quickly and easily customized to meet your needs—from adding your logo to developing proprietary content. Crisp books are available in print and electronic form. For more information on customization, see www.CrispSeries.com.

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PREVIEW

P A R T

1

Keys to Effective Interpersonal Communication

“*The ability to express an idea is well nigh as important as the idea itself.*”

—Bernard Baruch

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In this part:

- ▶ Believability
- ▶ Behavioral Skills

Believability

Most of us would agree that, in business as in all of life, the success of any presentation depends on the *believability* of the person speaking. Indeed, a person's believability is critical to any interpersonal success. No matter what's said, it isn't going to make much difference to the listener unless the speaker is credible and believed. Believability is the most significant factor to effective communication.

This isn't news to most people. What *is* news is how this elusive concept is rarely taught in school. Even more important, believability has yet to rise to the forefront of our minds as we engage in interpersonal communications in business; yet it's critical to our success.

We sell ourselves through communication. Whether we manage people, products, services or any combination of these, we're all selling ourselves. Our success is determined by our ability to communicate—to persuade our listeners to action. And our ability to communicate effectively is dictated by how we're perceived by our listeners. Therefore, the greatest investment we can make is in developing our communication skills, increasing our awareness of how we're perceived by others and improving those skills to achieve the impact we seek.

This book breaks down the intangible factor of *believability*, dissecting the whole package of *successful communication* into bite-sized pieces. It applies to public speaking, informal presentations, and the myriad of one-on-one interactions we engage in every day. Mastering interpersonal communication skills begins with building credibility and believability into everything we communicate.

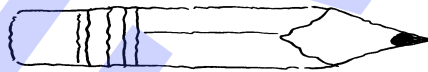
Verbal, Vocal, and Visual Cues to Believability

Three elements are communicated each time we speak—verbal, vocal, and visual. The verbal is the message itself—the words the speaker says. The vocal element is the voice—intonation, projection, and resonance of the voice that carries those words. And the visual element is what listeners see—primarily the speaker's face and body.

UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian, one of the foremost experts in personal communications, conducted a landmark study on the relationships among these three elements. He measured the differences in believability among the verbal, vocal, and visual elements. What his research found was that the degree of consistency among these three elements is what determines believability.



“I believe that a good leader does not set himself above the team.”



BELIEVABILITY BROKEN DOWN

In the spaces provided, write your estimate of how much believability each of these elements conveys when you're speaking (interpersonal communication) to persuade a listener. The percentages should total 100.

Verbal	_____	%
Vocal	_____	%
Visual	_____	%
Total	100	%

Compare your responses to Professor Mehrabian's results in the Appendix.

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Consistency = Believability

Professor Mehrabian's communications research, reported in his book *Silent Messages*, was based on what observers believed when an individual's verbal, vocal, and visual elements conveyed messages *inconsistent* with one another. When Mehrabian tested inconsistent messages, he found that the verbal cues were dominant only 7% of the time, the vocal dominated 38% of the time, and the visual cues were the primary carrier of trust and believability—a whopping 55% of the time.

If the message is *consistent*, then all three elements work together.

Consistency + Energy = Impact

The excitement and enthusiasm of the voice work with the energy and animation of the face and body to reflect the confidence and conviction of what's said. The words, the voice, and the delivery are all parts of a whole – a whole that must be integrated to convey a consistent message.

When we're nervous or awkward or under pressure, we tend to block our content and relay inconsistent messages. For example, if you look downward, clasp your hands in front of you in an inhibiting fig-leaf position, and speak in a halting and tremulous voice as you say "I am excited to be here"—you're delivering an inconsistent message. The words won't be believed.

When you're presenting your idea, you need energy to deliver your message into the heart and mind of every listener. Compare that with a rocket delivery system. There's the payload, or rocket ship, which a large Atlas or Titan booster rocket must launch into orbit. Without a strong, powerful booster rocket, it doesn't matter how well crafted the payload is, because it will never get there.

In communication, your message is the payload. If you're nervous or wooden, your delivery system will go awry and your payload won't be delivered.

Some people in business are like cannons ready to fire – like rockets with no payload. They may have great delivery skills but no verbal content. Others have detailed, brilliant ideas and productive things to say, but they block the delivery system to get it out there.

A large number of people in business give inconsistent messages. This inconsistency is probably the biggest barrier to effective interpersonal communications in business.

Making the Emotional Connection

Another barrier to effective interpersonal communication is failing to reach listeners' unconscious, *feeling* level. Extensive research has dramatized the importance of making this emotional connection. Indeed, it's a widely accepted principle of marketing and sales that people "buy on emotion and justify with fact."

Whether what you're selling are widgets or yourself and your ideas, whether your listener is one person or one thousand, if you don't connect with your listeners' emotions, you won't connect with them very effectively.

This is because of our two distinct brains—the *First Brain* and the *New Brain*. The First Brain is our emotional brain, which physically, and often unconsciously, directs our thinking brain, or what could be called the New Brain.

First Brain and New Brain

The First Brain consists of the emotionally powerful limbic system, which is the emotional center, and the brain stem, which provides immediate instinctual response. The First Brain is primitive, primal, and powerful. It operates at the unconscious level.

The largest part of the brain, the cerebrum, consists of a very thin layer of brain cells called the cerebral cortex. All conscious thought, including language and decision-making, takes place within this thin layer of brain cells—the New Brain.

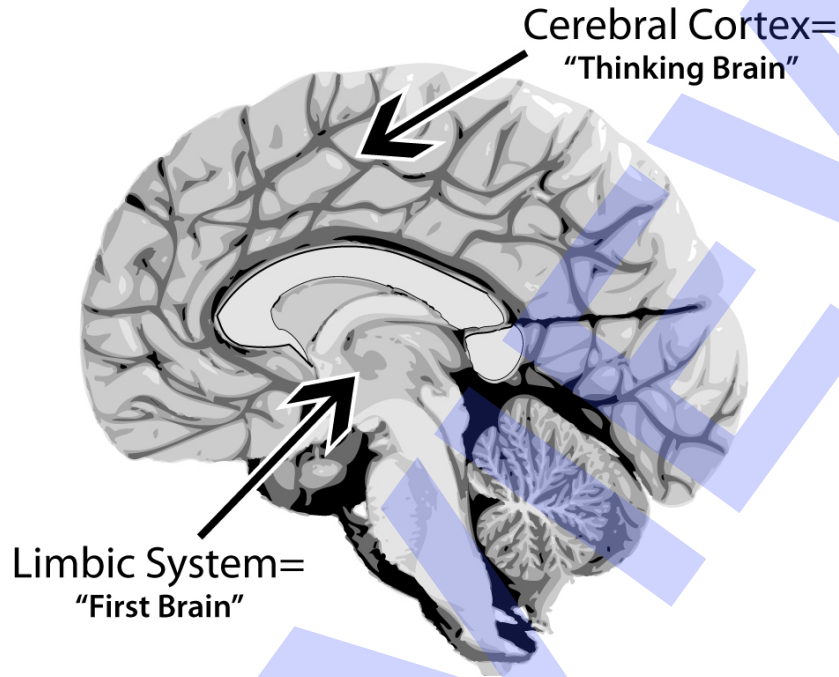
All sensory input—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—moves through the First Brain first. The visual input from our eyes goes directly to the First Brain. Then it's forwarded to the thinking New Brain, which makes sense of it or interprets it. If the visual pathways aren't stimulated very much (no movement, eye contact, gestures, etc.), the information isn't passed on as readily by the First Brain to the New Brain.

The same thing happens with the sound of a voice. The audio signals go into the First Brain before being transferred to the New Brain. If the sound tends to be flat, monotone, or filled with distracting nonwords, the First Brain tends to shut down and filter the information that's passed on.

The First Brain is a lookout, a defense mechanism, a channel for communications that provides positive sensory input. The First Brain also controls and triggers other emotions—such as distrust, anxiety, and indifference—because of what it sees and hears unconsciously. The First Brain is your mind's gatekeeper. It's this primitive part of the brain that gives intuitive impressions.

Have you ever met someone you immediately disliked? That's your First Brain reacting instinctively to a warning or signal that you might not even be aware of. Have you experienced love at first sight? Again, this is the First Brain in action, making a quick, intuitive judgment.

It's the First Brain that decides what information to let into the more developed and reasoning New Brain. This is why you must make an emotional connection to be heard.



First Brain	New Brain
Instinctual and primitive	Intellectual and advanced
300 to 500 million years old	3 to 4 million years old
Emotional	Rational
Preconscious/Unconscious	Conscious
Source of instinctive survival responses: hunger, thirst, danger, sex, and parental care	Source of thought, memory, language, creativity, planning, and decision-making
Common to many animals	Uniquely human

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Believing What We Like

Whether our First Brain registers an instant like or dislike of a person we encounter, there can be little doubt that what it's responding to is something that person is communicating—verbally, vocally, or visually. No wonder likeability is a major component of trust. If we respond positively to people's communication, we tend to like them, and research shows we tend to trust people we like. Likeability and believability are intertwined—and both are dependent upon effective interpersonal communication.

Measuring the Personality Factor

The Gallup Poll has conducted revealing communications polls for all of the U.S. presidential races starting with the Kennedy/Nixon contest in 1960. This poll is conducted just two months before the presidential election. It asks for voters' preference in three areas—issues, party affiliation, and likeability, or “the personality factor.”

What the polls have found is that the personality factor, scientifically measured by the Staples Scalometer, has been the only consistent predictor of the outcome of every one of the presidential races.

The Stanford Study

Professor Thomas W. Harrell of the Stanford Graduate School of Business completed a 20-year study¹ relating to career success. Although there were no “certain passports to success,” Harrell found there were three consistent personal qualities that appeared to have a positive effect on the careers of those studied. These included:

- An outgoing, ascendant personality
- A desire to persuade, talk to, and work with people
- A need for power

Although interpersonal communication skills aren't necessarily related to the third characteristic, they're certainly intertwined in the first two. This is the same personality factor described above.

These studies and polls show that personality plays a major role in the effectiveness of your interpersonal relationships. Whatever you strive for, you can be sure that communication is the skill that will get you there. Luckily, despite what you may have read, you can alter your personality and change your communication habits to help you improve your interpersonal skills.

¹ Stanford University Study: Harrell & Alpert, March 1986