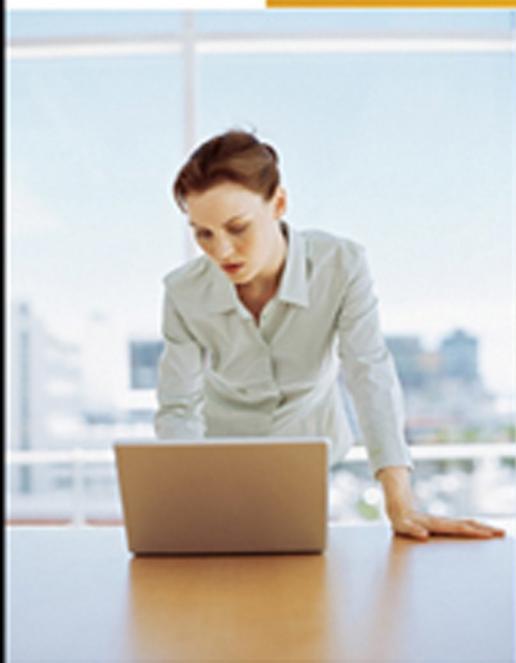


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# Business Communication

Process & Product



**Mary Ellen Guffey**

6th Edition

**Business Communication: Process and Product, 6e**  
**Mary Ellen Guffey**

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# Chapter 1

## Communicating in Today's Workplace

### OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- 1 Understand the importance of communication skills in relation to career success; and explain the need for thinking critically, taking charge of your career, and strengthening your communication skills.
- 2 Recognize significant changes in today's workplace and how these changes increase the need for excellent communication skills.
- 3 Analyze the process of communication and how to engage it effectively.
- 4 Recognize barriers to interpersonal communication and examine specific strategies for overcoming those barriers.
- 5 Analyze the internal and external functions of communication in organizations as well as compare the advantages and disadvantages of oral and written communication.
- 6 Examine critically the flow of communication in organizations including barriers and methods for overcoming those barriers.
- 7 Understand the ethical goals of a business communicator and tools for doing the right thing.



# Communicating in Today's Workplace Part 1

## A Great Communicator Heads Sears and Kmart

"Our worst stores are dungeons," exclaimed Aylwin B. Lewis, the new chief executive of Sears Holdings Corporation, as he addressed Kmart managers at a dinner meeting. "Well, who wants to work in a dungeon? Who wants to shop in a dungeon?"<sup>1</sup> A gifted speaker and communicator, Lewis was demonstrating one of the skills for which he is best known—inspiring the troops with stirring oratory. It was this and other communication skills that paved the way for his journey through the ranks to become the highest-ranking African-American executive in the U.S. retail industry.

Two massive but troubled retail giants, Sears Roebuck and Kmart, merged to become Sears Holdings. It all started when financier Edward S. Lampert gained control of Kmart at a bargain price as it sank into bankruptcy. Next he snapped up a struggling Sears, thus creating the nation's third-largest retailer with 3,800 stores in the United States and Canada. Lampert then needed an executive to steer the newly formed colossus, and he tapped veteran fast-food restaurant executive Aylwin Lewis.

The son of a factory porter, Lewis paid for his education at the University of Houston by cleaning rugs full time. "I was a typical commuter student," he recalled. He earned dual degrees in literature and business management. "I wanted to get a soft degree that I thought I would use," he explained. "But I wanted a hard degree to understand the world."<sup>2</sup> His business degree honed his business skills, and his literature degree taught him how to do research and how to write. That training, he said, was instrumental in his career success.<sup>3</sup> His speaking skills, developed through church recitations as a boy, made him stand out as a manager. His writing skills led the way to executive promotions.

To pay for graduate school, he worked at Jack in the Box, a fast-food restaurant. "I fell in love with the notion of serving customers," he recalled. "Even as an assistant manager, I liked doing the hiring, the ordering, overseeing the food quality. I loved being a leader."<sup>4</sup> After earning an MBA, he went on to a 25-year career rising through the Jack in the Box ranks and into management positions at Yum Brands, the world's largest restaurant company with holdings that included Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC, Long John Silver's, and A&W All-American Food restaurants.

Asked about his key to climbing the ladder of success, Lewis replied: "I'm a learner. . . . I would have been dead meat leaving the



restaurant industry coming to the retail industry if I didn't have the aptitude to say, 'I'm a student of life and I have to learn every day.'"<sup>5</sup> You will learn more about this case study on page 22.

### Critical Thinking

- What do you think Aylwin Lewis meant when he referred to a "soft degree" and a "hard degree"?
- What skills do you think businesspeople need to succeed in today's workplace?
- Why do you think it is important today to be willing to continue learning every day?

<http://www.searsholdings.com>

© Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

## Building Your Career Success With Communication Skills

Developing excellent communication skills is extremely important to your career success, whether you are already working or are about to enter today's workplace. Aylwin B. Lewis, CEO of Sears Holdings, which owns both Sears Roebuck and Kmart, found that his speaking and writing skills were crucial as he rose from assistant manager at Jack in the Box to his position as chief of the nation's third-largest retailer. In this chapter you will learn about the importance of communication skills, the changing world of work, the process of communication and its barriers, and ethical challenges facing businesspeople today. Each section covers the latest information about an issue. It also provides tips and suggestions that will help you function successfully in today's dynamic workplace.

### The Importance of Communication Skills in Today's Workplace

Employer surveys show that communication skills are critical to effective job placement, performance, career advancement, and organizational success.<sup>6</sup> In making hiring decisions, employers often rank communication skills among the most-requested items. Many

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

*Understand the importance of communication skills in relation to career success; and explain the need for thinking critically, taking charge of your career, and strengthening your communication skills.*

**Communication skills are critical to your job placement, performance, career advancement, and organizational success.**

### Spotlight on Communicators



Aylwin Lewis, CEO of Sears Holdings, had much experience in fast-food restaurants before being picked to head the giant Sears and Kmart chains. Industry observers thought he might be out of his element in

moving to retailing. Although he acknowledged a steep learning curve, Lewis welcomed the challenge. “Leadership skills, communication skills, culture-building skills,” he said, “those are all very transferable.” These skills are also learnable. Asked if being an African-American role model was a burden, he responded that his goal was to make it easier for the next generation to achieve the American dream. He encourages young people to expect to reach jobs like his. Success is easier to attain, however, if one builds a solid foundation with communication and leadership skills acquired early on. His undergraduate degrees in English and business management helped him rise through the ranks. But he admits that he expects to continue learning every day on the job.

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**NOTE: Because this is a well-researched textbook, you will find small superscript numbers in the text. These announce information sources. Full citations begin on page N-1 near the end of the book. This edition uses a modified American Psychological Association (APA) format that provides superscripts leading to full citations in the Notes section.**

job advertisements specifically ask for excellent oral and written communication skills. In a poll of recruiters, oral and written communication skills were by a large margin the top skill set sought.<sup>7</sup> In another poll, executives were asked what they looked for in a job candidate. The top choices were teamwork skills, critical thinking, analytical reasoning skills, and oral and written communication skills.<sup>8</sup>

When we discuss *communication skills*, we generally mean reading, listening, nonverbal, speaking, and writing skills. In this book we focus on listening, nonverbal, speaking, and writing skills. Chapters are devoted to each of those skills. Special attention is given to writing skills because they are difficult to develop and increasingly significant.

### Writing Skills Are More Important Than Ever

Writing skills are particularly important today because technology enables us to transmit messages more rapidly, more often, and to greater numbers of people than ever before. Writing skills are also significant because many people work together but are not physically together. They stay connected through spoken and written messages. Writing skills, which were always a career advantage, are now a necessity.<sup>9</sup> They can be your ticket to work—or your ticket out the door, according to a business executive responding to a recent survey. This survey of 120 American corporations, by the National Commission on Writing, a panel established by the College Board, found that two thirds of salaried employees have some writing responsibility. Yet, about one third of them do not meet the writing requirements for their positions.<sup>10</sup>

“Businesses are crying out—they need to have people who write better,” said Gaston Caperton, executive and College Board president. The ability to write opens doors to professional employment. People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired. If already working, they are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion. Writing is a marker of high-skill, high-wage, professional work, according to Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York and chair of the National Commission on Writing. If you can’t express yourself clearly, he says, you limit your opportunities for many positions.<sup>11</sup>

How important is writing to your income? A *Fortune* magazine article reported this finding: “Among people with a two- or four-year college degree, those in the highest 20 percent in writing ability earn, on average, more than three times what those with the worst writing skills make.”<sup>12</sup> One corporate president explained that many people climbing the corporate ladder are good. When he faced a hard choice between candidates, he used writing ability as the deciding factor. He said that sometimes writing is the only skill that separates a candidate from the competition.

### Communication Skills Must Be Learned

You are not born with the abilities to read, listen, speak, and write effectively. These skills must be learned. Thriving in the demanding work world depends on many factors, some of which you cannot control. But one factor that you do control is how well you communicate. The goals of this book and this course are to teach you basic business communication skills, such as how to write a memo or letter and how to make a presentation. You will also learn additional powerful communication skills, as summarized in Figure 1.1. This book and this course may well be the most important in your entire college curriculum because they will equip you with the skills most needed in today’s dynamic workplace.

## Thriving as a Knowledge Worker in the Information Age

The U.S. economy is based on information and knowledge. Physical labor, raw materials, and capital are no longer the key ingredients in the creation of wealth. Tomorrow’s wealth depends on the development and exchange of knowledge. Individuals in the workforce

**Knowledge workers deal with symbols, such as words, figures, and data.**

**FIGURE 1.1** How This Book and Course Can Help You Build Communication Skills

| <i>This business communication book and this course will help you</i>   |
|---|
| ● Apply a universal process to solve communication problems throughout your career.                                   |
| ● Learn writing techniques and organizational strategies to compose clear, concise, and purposeful business messages. |
| ● Master effective presentation skills to get your ideas across to large and small groups.                            |
| ● Learn to be a valuable team player.   |
| ● Work productively with the Internet and digital communication technologies.   |
| ● Value diversity so that you can function with sensitivity in intercultural work environments.                       |
| ● Develop tools for meeting ethically challenging situations.   |
| ● Land the job of your dreams with invaluable job-search, résumé-writing, and interviewing tips.                      |

offer their knowledge, not their muscles. *Knowledge workers*, said management guru Peter Drucker, get paid for their education and their ability to learn.<sup>13</sup> Microsoft uses the term *information workers* to describe those who work with technology.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the terminology, knowledge and information workers engage in mind work. They deal with symbols: words, figures, and data. Most recent estimates suggest that knowledge workers outnumber other workers in North America by at least a four-to-one margin.<sup>15</sup>

Some U.S. knowledge workers worry over a new threat—the outsourcing of their jobs to skilled workers in India and China. Outsourcing overseas is a reality, and jobs that can be condensed to a set of rules are likely to go first—either to workers abroad or to computers. However, this country almost certainly will not run out of jobs.<sup>16</sup> Although we cannot predict the kinds of jobs that will be available, they will undoubtedly require brainpower and education. As existing jobs give way to shifts in technology and competition, the economy will adjust, as it has always done in the past. New jobs requiring new skills and talents will emerge.<sup>17</sup>

## What Does This Mean for You?

As a knowledge and information worker, you can expect to be generating, processing, and exchanging information. Whether you work in the new economy of *e-commerce* (Internet-based businesses) or the old economy of *bricks-and-mortar* companies, nearly three out of four jobs will involve some form of mind work. Jobs that require thinking, brainpower, and decision-making skills are likely to remain plentiful. To be successful in these jobs, you will need to be able to think critically, make decisions, and communicate those decisions.

**Knowledge workers generate, process, and exchange information.**

## Learning to Think Critically

Management and employees will be working together in such areas as product development, quality control, and customer satisfaction. Whether you are an executive or subordinate, you will be asked to think creatively and critically. Even in factory production lines, workers are part of the knowledge culture. “One of the secrets of Toyota’s success,” said Takis Athanasopoulos, chief executive of the Japanese carmaker’s European operations, “is that the company encourages every worker, no matter how far down the production line, to consider himself a knowledge worker and to think creatively about improving his particular corner of the organization.”<sup>18</sup>

Thinking creatively and critically means having opinions that are backed by reasons and evidence. When your boss or team leader says, “What do you think we ought to do?” you want to be able to supply good ideas. The Career Coach box on page 6 provides a five-point critical thinking plan to help you solve problems and make decisions. But having a plan is not enough. You also need chances to try the plan out and get feedback from colleagues and your boss (your instructor, for the time being). At the end of each chapter, you will find activities and problems that will help you develop and apply your critical-thinking skills.

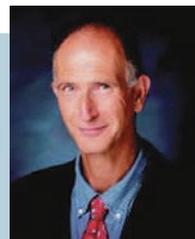
**Thinking critically means having opinions that are backed by reasons and evidence.**

## Taking Charge of Your Career

In the new world of work, you can look forward to constant training to acquire new skills that will help you keep up with evolving technologies and procedures. You can also expect to be exercising greater control over your career. Many workers today will not find nine-to-five

### Spotlight on Communicators

“We are entering an age where intangible assets like expertise, intelligence, speed, agility, imagination, maneuverability, networks, passion, responsiveness and innovation—all facets of ‘knowledge’—become more important than the tangibles of traditional balance-sheet perspectives,” contends Oren Harari, management expert, futurist, and prolific author.



© Professor of Management, University of San Francisco

# CAREER COACH

## Sharpening Your Skills for Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Gone are the days when management expected workers to check their brains at the door and do only as told. As a knowledge worker, you will be expected to use your brains in thinking critically. You will be solving problems and making decisions. Much of this book is devoted to helping you learn to solve problems and communicate those decisions to management, fellow workers, clients, the government, and the public.

Faced with a problem or an issue, most of us do a lot of worrying before separating the issues or making a decision. All that worrying can become directed thinking by channeling it into the following procedure.

1. **Identify and clarify the problem.** Your first task is to recognize that a problem exists. Some problems are big and unmistakable, such as failure of an air-freight delivery service to get packages to customers on time. Other problems may be continuing annoyances, such as regularly running out of toner for an office copy machine. The first step in reaching a solution is pinpointing the problem area.
2. **Gather information.** Learn more about the problem situation. Look for possible causes and solutions. This step may mean checking files, calling suppliers, or brainstorming with fellow workers. The air-freight delivery service, for example, would investigate the tracking systems of the commercial airlines carrying its packages to determine what went wrong.
3. **Evaluate the evidence.** Where did the information come from? Does it represent various points of view? What biases could be expected from each source? How accurate is the information gathered? Is it fact or opinion? For example, it is a fact that packages are missing; it is an opinion that they are merely lost and will turn up eventually.

4. **Consider alternatives and implications.** Draw conclusions from the gathered evidence and pose solutions. Then weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. What are the costs, benefits, and consequences? What are the obstacles, and how can they be handled? Most important, what solution best serves your goals and those of your organization? Here's where your creativity is especially important.
5. **Choose the best alternative and test it.** Select an alternative and try it out to see if it meets your expectations. If it does, implement your decision. If it doesn't, rethink your alternatives. The freight company decided to give its unhappy customers free delivery service to make up for the lost packages and downtime. Be sure to continue monitoring and adjusting the solution to ensure its effectiveness over time.

### Career Application

As the owner of a popular local McDonald's franchise, you recognize a problem. Customers are unhappy with the multiple lines for service. They don't seem to know where to stand to be next served. Tempers flare when aggressive customers cut in line, and other customers spend so much time protecting their places in line that they fail to study the menu. Then they don't know what to order when they approach the counter. As a franchise owner, you would like to solve this problem. How would the steps discussed here be helpful in approaching this problem?



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*Buy the way you want and save!*

**Constantly changing technologies and work procedures mean continual training for employees.**

**This book, this course, and your instructor can help you develop the skills you need to succeed in today's challenging workplace.**

jobs, predictable pay increases, lifetime security, and even conventional workplaces. Don't presume that companies will provide you with a clearly defined career path or planned developmental experiences. In the private sector you can expect to work for multiple employers, moving back and forth between work and education and between work and family responsibilities.<sup>19</sup> Whether you are currently employed or about to enter the constantly changing work world, you must be willing to continuously learn new skills that supplement the strong foundation of basic skills you are acquiring in college. The most successful businesspeople, such as Aylwin Lewis at Sears Holdings, are willing to become lifelong learners.

### Strengthening Your Communication Skills

This book is filled with model documents, practice exercises, procedures, tips, strategies, suggestions, summaries, and checklists—all meant to ensure that you develop the superior communication skills that are so vital to your success as a businessperson today.

Remember, communication skills are not inherent; they must be learned. Remember, too, to take advantage of the unique opportunity you now have. You have an expert who is willing to work with you to help improve your writing, speaking, and other communication skills. Many organizations pay thousands of dollars to communication coaches and trainers to teach employees the very skills that you are learning in this course. Your instructor is your coach. Take advantage of this opportunity, and get your money's worth! With this book as your guide and your instructor as your coach, you will find that this course, as we mentioned earlier, could very well be the most important in your entire college curriculum.

## Factors Affecting You in Today's Workplace

Today's workplace is undergoing profound changes. As a businessperson and especially as a business communicator, you will undoubtedly be affected by many transformations. Some of the most significant changes include global competition, flattened management hierarchies, and team-based projects. Other changes reflect our constantly evolving information technology, new work environments, a diverse workforce, and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy. The following overview of this new world of work reveals how excellent communication skills are key to your success.

### Heightened Global Competition

Small, medium, and large companies increasingly find themselves competing in global rather than local markets. Improved systems of telecommunication, advanced forms of transportation, and saturated local markets—all of these developments have encouraged companies to move beyond familiar territories to emerging markets around the world. Wal-Mart courts shoppers in China with exotic fruits and live seafood.<sup>20</sup> PepsiCo fights Coca-Cola for new customers in India. FedEx learns the ropes in South America, and McDonald's feeds hungry Russians at Pushkin Square, its busiest restaurant in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Doing business in far-flung countries means dealing with people who may be very different from you. They may have different religions, engage in different customs, live different lifestyles, and rely on different approaches in business. Now add the complications of multiple time zones, vast distances between offices, and different languages. No wonder global communicators can blunder. Take, for example, the failure of Nike's "Just Do It" campaign in China. It emphasized individualistic youthful irreverence, which violates the culture of collectivist China. Nike replaced those ads with a 10-second spot featuring a schoolkid impressing classmates by spinning the globe on his finger. The ad expresses playfulness and daring without rebellion.<sup>22</sup>

Successful communication in these new markets requires developing new skills and attitudes. These include cultural knowledge and sensitivity, flexibility, and patience. Because these skills and attitudes may be difficult to achieve, you will receive special communication training to help you deal with intercultural business transactions.

### Flattened Management Hierarchies

In response to intense global competition and other pressures, businesses have for years been cutting costs and flattening their management hierarchies. This flattening means that fewer layers of managers separate decision makers from line workers. In traditional companies, information flows through many levels of managers. In flat organizations, however, where the lines of communication are shorter, decision makers can react more quickly to market changes. Some time ago, toymaker Mattel transformed itself from an "out-of-control money loser" by tightening its organization and cutting six layers from its organizational hierarchy. As a result, when its Matchbox developers came up with a smashing idea for a toy firehouse that required no assembly, the idea could be rushed into production. It didn't languish in the pipeline, drowning in multiple layers of management. Like many restructured organizations, Mattel got rid of "silos" that slice the company up vertically into separate divisions for marketing, operations, production, and human resources. Restructured companies organize work with horizontal teams that allow different areas to interact more efficiently.

Progressive organizations are in the midst of changing from "command and control" to "coordination and cultivation" management styles. This means that work is organized to let people use their own talents more wisely.<sup>23</sup> But today's flatter organizations also bring greater communication challenges. In the past, authoritarian and hierarchical management structures did not require that every employee be a skilled communicator. Managers simply passed along messages to the next level. Today, however, frontline employees as well as managers participate in decision making. Nearly everyone is a writer and a communicator. Businesspeople prepare their own messages; secretaries no longer "clean up" their bosses' writing.

### Expanded Team-Based Management

Along with flatter chains of command, companies are expanding team-based operations to increase employee involvement in decision making and to improve communication. Nearly

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

*Recognize significant changes in today's workplace and how these changes increase the need for excellent communication skills.*

**Many of the changes in the new world of work make communication skills a key to your success.**

**Communication is more complicated with people who have different religions, customs, and lifestyles.**

**Flatter organizations demand that every employee be a skilled communicator.**

80 percent of employees in all industries have adopted some form of self-directed teams or quality circles. At the Frito-Lay plant in Lubbock, Texas, workers formerly loaded bags of potato chips into cartons. Now organized into work teams, they are responsible for everything from potato processing to equipment maintenance. They even interview new-hires and make quality control decisions.<sup>24</sup> At Cigna Corporation, a huge national insurance company, three organizational layers were flattened and teams were formed to reduce backups in processing customer claims. The formation of these teams forced technology specialists to communicate constantly with business specialists. Suddenly, computer programmers had to do more than code and debug; they had to listen, interpret, and explain. All members of the team had to analyze problems and negotiate solutions.<sup>25</sup>

**Workers on teams need strong communication skills to collaborate and work together effectively.**

When companies form cross-functional teams, individuals must work together and share information. Working relationships can become strained when individuals don't share the same background, knowledge, or training. Some companies must hire communication coaches to help existing teams get along. They work to develop interpersonal, negotiation, and collaboration techniques. But companies would prefer to hire new workers who already possess these skills. That is why so many advertisements for new employees say "must possess good communication skills."

**Ethics Check**

**Too Connected?**

**Office workers use smart phones, e-mail, voicemail, and text messaging. Many are literally always on call and feel overwhelmed. What are the limits of connectedness? Is it fair to dodge an unpleasant call by sending it to voice mail or to delay answering certain e-mail messages?**

**Innovative Communication Technologies**

New electronic technologies are dramatically affecting the way workers communicate. We now exchange information and stay in touch by using e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, PDAs, fax, voice mail, wireless networking, cell phones, powerful laptop computers, and satellite communications. Through teleconferencing and videoconferencing, we can conduct meetings with associates around the world. We're also seeing the rapid development of social software such as weblogs, wikis (multiuser weblogs), and peer-to-peer tools, all of which make it easier for workers to communicate online almost instantaneously. Interactive software enables dozens or even hundreds of users to collaborate on projects. What's more, no self-respecting businessperson today would make a presentation without using sophisticated presentation software. We rely heavily on the Internet and the Web for collecting information, serving customers, and selling products and services. Figure 1.2, on pages 10–11, illustrates many new technologies you will meet in today's workplace.

To use these new resources most effectively, you, as a skilled business communicator, must develop a tool kit of new communication skills. You will want to know how to select the best communication channel, how to use each channel safely and effectively, and how to use online search tools efficiently. All of these topics will be covered in coming chapters.

As digital technology continues to network people around the globe, businesses are increasingly turning to videoconferencing as the ultimate collaboration tool. Whether through basic Web-cam devices or across ultra-high definition video, videoconferencing enables businesspeople to forgo travel yet work with people half a world away—as if they were officemates. *What advantages does videoconferencing have relative to other innovative communication technologies, and how is digital communication contributing to the emergence of the new workplace?*



© Ron Chapple / Thinkstock Images / Jupiterimages

## New Work Environments

Today's work environments are also changing. Instead of individual offices and cubicles, companies are encouraging open offices with flexible workstations, shared conference rooms, and boomerang-shaped desks that save space. Thanks largely to advances in communication and mobile technologies, millions of workers no longer work nine-to-five jobs that confine them to offices. They have flexible working arrangements so that they can work at home or on the road. One out of every ten employees now telecommutes full or part time.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, many workers are part of virtual teams that complete projects without ever meeting each other. Tools such as e-mail, instant and text messaging, file sharing, conferencing software, and wireless networking make it easy for employees to collaborate or complete their work in the office, at home, or on the road.

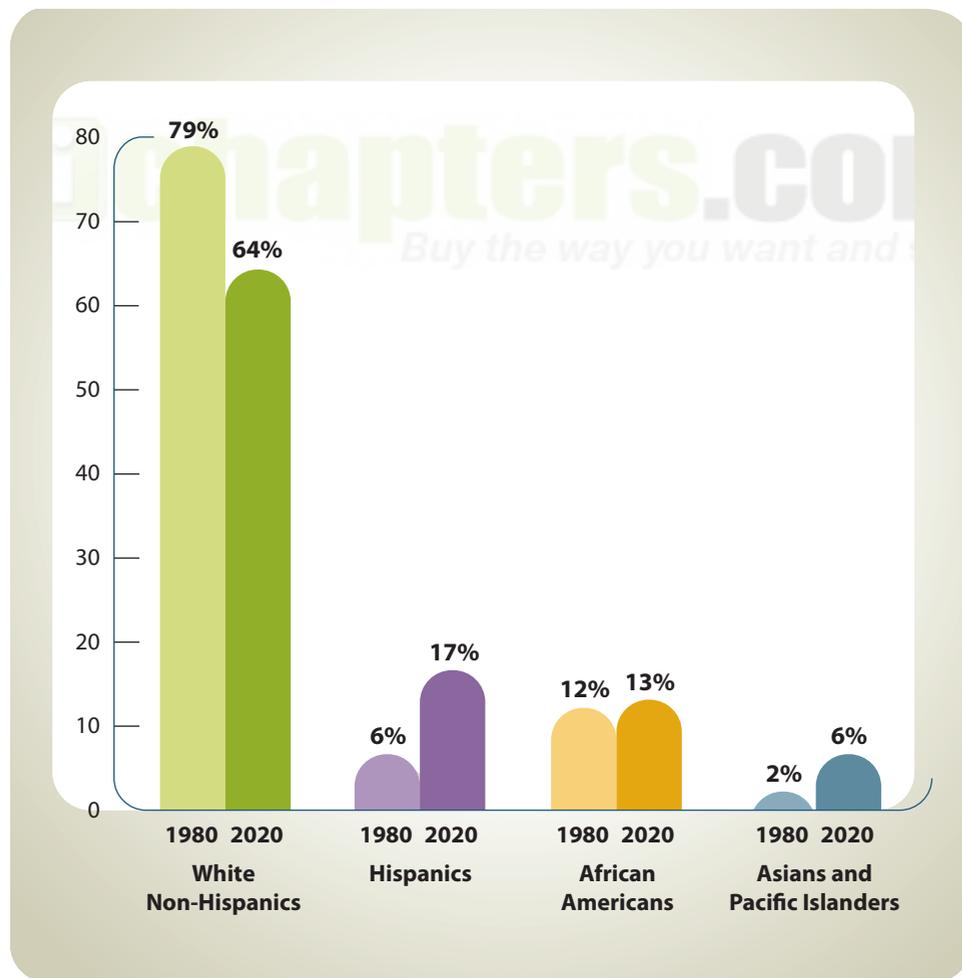
As more and more employees work separately, communication skills become even more important. Staying connected involves sending messages, most of which are written. This means that your writing skills will constantly be on display.

## Increasingly Diverse Workforce

Changes in today's work environments include more than innovative technology, team management, and different work environments. The U.S. workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. As shown in Figure 1.3, the white non-Hispanic population of the United States is expected to drop from 79 percent in 1980 to 64 percent in 2020. Hispanics will climb from 6 percent to 17 percent, African Americans will increase from 12 percent to 13 percent, and Asians will rise from 2 percent to 6 percent.<sup>27</sup> In addition to increasing numbers of minorities, the workforce will see a big jump in older workers. By 2020 the number of workers aged 55 and older will grow to 20 percent.<sup>28</sup> As a result of these and other demographic trends, businesses must create a work environment that values and supports all people.

**Workers today are collaborating, telecommuting, working in open offices, and serving on virtual teams, all of which demand excellent communication skills.**

**Communicating with workers who differ in race, ethnicity, gender, and age requires new attitudes and skills.**



**FIGURE 1.3** Racial and Ethnic Makeup of U.S. Population, 1980 to 2020

**FIGURE 1.2** Communication and Collaborative Technologies



**Communication Technologies: Reshaping the World of Work**

Today's workplace is changing dramatically as a result of innovative software, superfast wireless networks, and numerous technologies that allow workers to share information, work from remote locations, and be more productive in or away from the office. We're seeing a gradual progression from basic capabilities, such as e-mail and calendaring, to deeper functionality, such as remote database access, multifunctional devices, and Web-based collaborative applications. Becoming familiar with modern office and collaboration technologies can help you be successful in today's digital workplace.

**Telephony: VoIP**

Savvy businesses are switching from traditional phone service to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). This technology allows callers to communicate using a broadband Internet connection, thus eliminating long-distance and local telephone charges. Higher-end VoIP systems now support unified voice mail, e-mail, click-to-call capabilities, and softphones (phones using computer networking). Free or low-cost Internet telephony sites, such as the popular Skype, are also increasingly used by businesses.



**Open Offices**

Widespread use of laptop computers, wireless technology, and VoIP have led to more fluid, flexible, and open workspaces. Smaller computers and flat-screen monitors enable designers to save space with boomerang-shaped workstations and cockpit-style work surfaces rather than space-hogging corner work areas. Smaller breakout areas for impromptu meetings are taking over some cubicle space, and digital databases are replacing file cabinets.



**Multifunctional Printers**

Stand-alone copiers, fax machines, scanners, and printers have been replaced with multifunctional devices. Offices are transitioning from a "print and distribute" environment to a "distribute and print" environment. Security measures include pass codes and even biometric thumbprint scanning to make sure data streams are not captured, interrupted, or edited.

**Handheld Wireless Devices**

A new generation of lightweight, handheld devices provide phone, e-mail, Web browsing, and calendar options anywhere there's a wireless network. Devices such as the BlackBerry and the Palm Treo now allow you to tap into corporate databases and intranets from remote locations. You can check customers' files, complete orders, and send out receipts without returning to the office.



**Company Intranets**

To share insider information, many companies provide their own protected Web sites called intranets. An intranet may handle company e-mail, announcements, an employee directory,

a policy handbook, frequently asked questions, personnel forms and data, employee discussion forums, shared documents, and other employee information.

**Voice Recognition**

Computers equipped with voice recognition software enable users to dictate up to 160 words a minute with accurate transcription. Voice recognition is particularly helpful to disabled workers and to professionals with heavy dictation loads, such as physicians and attorneys. Users can create documents, enter data, compose and send e-mails, browse the Web, and control the desktop—all by voice.



**Electronic Presentations**

Business presentations in PowerPoint can be projected from a laptop or PDA or posted online. Sophisticated presentations may include animations, sound effects, digital photos, video clips, or hyperlinks to Internet sites. In some industries, PowerPoint slides ("decks") are replacing or supplementing traditional hard-copy reports.



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## Collaboration Technologies: Rethinking the Way We Work Together

Global competition, expanding markets, and the ever-increasing pace of business accelerate the development of exciting collaboration tools. New tools make it possible to work together without being together. Your colleagues may be down the hall, across the country, or around the world. With today's tools, you can exchange ideas, solve problems, develop products, forecast future performance, and complete team projects any time of the day or night and anywhere in the world. Blogs and wikis, part of the so-called Web 2.0 era, are social tools that create multidirectional conversations among customers and employees. Web 2.0 moves Web applications from "read only" to "read-write," thus enabling greater participation and collaboration.



### Blogs, Podcasts, and Wikis

A *blog* is a Web site with journal entries usually written by one person with comments added by others. Businesses use blogs to keep customers and employees

informed and to receive feedback. Company developments can be posted, updated, and categorized for easy cross-referencing. When the writer adds audio, the blog becomes a *podcast*. A *wiki* is a Web site that allows multiple users to collaboratively create and edit pages. Information gets lost in e-mails, but blogs and wikis provide an easy way to communicate and keep track of what's said.

### Voice Conferencing

Telephone "bridges" allow two or more callers from any location to share the same call. *Voice conferencing* (also called *audioconferencing*, *teleconferencing*, or just plain *conference calling*) enables people to collaborate by telephone.

Communicators at both ends use enhanced speakerphones to talk and be heard simultaneously.



### Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing allows participants to meet in special conference rooms equipped with cameras and television screens. Groups see each other and interact in real time although they may be far apart. Faster computers, rapid Internet connections, and better cameras now enable 2 to 200 participants to sit at their own PCs and share applications, spreadsheets, presentations, and photos.

### Web Conferencing

With services such as GoToMeeting, WebEx, or Microsoft LiveMeeting, all you need are a PC and an Internet connection to hold a meeting (*webinar*) with customers or colleagues in real time. Although the functions are constantly evolving, Web conferencing currently incorporates screen sharing, chats, slide presentations, text messaging, and application sharing.



### Presence Technology

Presence technology makes it possible to locate and identify a computing device as soon as users connect to the network. This technology is an integral part of communication devices including cell phones, laptop computers, PDAs, pagers, and GPS devices. Collaboration is possible wherever and whenever users are online.

### Video Phones

Using advanced video compression technology, video phones transmit real-time audio and video so that communicators can see each other as they collaborate. With a video phone, people can videoconference anywhere in the world over a broadband IP (Internet Protocol) connection without a computer or a television screen.



Communicating in this diverse work environment requires new attitudes and skills. Acquiring these new employment skills is certainly worth the effort because of the benefits diversity brings to consumers, work teams, and business organizations. A diverse staff is better able to read trends and respond to the increasingly diverse customer base in local and world markets. In the workplace, diversity also makes good business sense. Teams made up of people with various experiences are more likely to create the products that consumers demand. Customers also want to deal with companies that respect their values. They are more likely to say, "If you are a company whose ads do not include me, or whose workforce does not include me, I will not buy from you." Learning to cooperate and communicate successfully with diverse coworkers should be a major priority for all businesspeople.

## Understanding the Process of Communication

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3

Analyze the process of communication and how to engage it effectively.

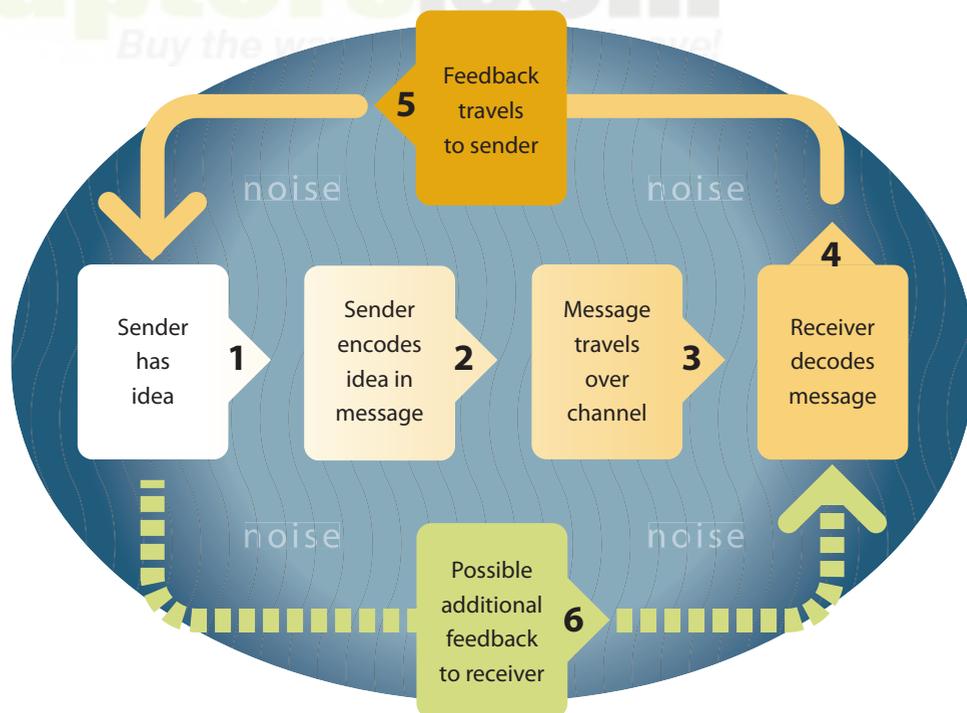
Because communication is a central factor in the emerging knowledge economy and a major consideration for anyone entering today's workforce, we need to look more closely at the total process of communication. Just what is communication? For our purposes communication is the *transmission of information and meaning from one individual or group to another*. The crucial element in this definition is *meaning*. Communication has as its central objective the transmission of meaning. The process of communication is successful only when the receiver understands an idea as the sender intended it. Both parties must agree not only on the information transmitted but also on the meaning of that information. How does an idea travel from one person to another? Despite what you may have seen in futuristic science fiction movies, we can't just glance at another person and transfer meaning directly from mind to mind. We engage in a sensitive process of communication, discussed here and depicted in Figure 1.4.

### Sender Has Idea

The communication process had five steps: idea formation, message encoding, message transmission, message decoding, and feedback.

The process of communication begins when the person with whom the message originates—the *sender*—has an idea. The form of the idea will be influenced by complex factors surrounding the sender: mood, frame of reference, background, culture, and physical makeup, as well as the context of the situation and many other factors. The way you greet people on campus or on the job, for example, depends a lot on how you feel, whom you are addressing

FIGURE 1.4 The Communication Process



Note: A more comprehensive model of the communication process is available in the instructor's PowerPoint program.

(a classmate, a professor, a colleague, or your boss), and what your culture has trained you to say (“Good morning,” “Hey,” “Hi,” “Howdy,” or “How ya doing?”).

The form of the idea, whether a simple greeting or a complex idea, is shaped by assumptions based on the sender’s experiences. A manager sending an e-mail announcement to employees assumes they will be receptive, whereas direct-mail advertisers assume that receivers will give only a quick glance to their message. The ability to accurately predict how a message will affect its receiver and skill in adapting that message to its receiver are key factors in successful communication.

## Sender Encodes Idea in Message

The next step in the communication process involves *encoding*. This means converting the idea into words or gestures that will convey meaning. A major problem in communicating any message verbally is that words have different meanings for different people. When misunderstandings result from missed meanings, it is called *bypassing*. Recognizing how easy it is to be misunderstood, skilled communicators choose familiar words with concrete meanings on which both senders and receivers agree. In selecting proper symbols, senders must be alert to the receiver’s communication skills, attitudes, background, experiences, and culture: How will the selected words affect the receiver? In Great Britain, for example, a Dr. Pepper cola promotion failed miserably because American managers had not done their homework. They had to change their “I’m a Pepper” slogan after learning that *pepper* is British slang for *prostitute*.<sup>29</sup> Because the sender initiates a communication transaction, he or she has primary responsibility for its success or failure. Choosing appropriate words or symbols is critical to a successful message.

## Message Travels Over Channel

The medium over which the message is physically transmitted is the *channel*. Messages may be delivered by computer, telephone, cell phone, letter, memorandum, report, announcement, picture, spoken word, fax, Web page, or through some other channel. Because communication channels deliver both verbal and nonverbal messages, senders must choose the channel and shape the message carefully. A company may use its annual report, for example, as a channel to deliver many messages to stockholders. The verbal message lies in the report’s financial and organizational news. Nonverbal messages, though, are conveyed by the report’s appearance (showy versus bland), layout (ample white space versus tightly packed columns of print), and tone (conversational versus formal).

Anything that interrupts the transmission of a message in the communication process is called *noise*. Channel noise ranges from static that disrupts a telephone conversation to typographical and spelling errors in a letter or e-mail message. Such errors damage the credibility of the sender. Channel noise might even include the annoyance a receiver feels when the sender chooses an improper medium for sending a message, such as announcing a loan rejection via postcard or firing an employee by e-mail.

## Receiver Decodes Message

The individual for whom the message is intended is the *receiver*. Translating the message from its symbol form into meaning involves *decoding*. Only when the receiver understands the meaning intended by the sender—that is, successfully decodes the message—does communication take place. Such success, however, is difficult to achieve because no two people share the same life experiences and because many barriers can disrupt the process.

Decoding can be disrupted internally by the receiver’s lack of attention to or bias against the sender. It can be disrupted externally by loud sounds or illegible words. Decoding can also be sidetracked by semantic obstacles, such as misunderstood words or emotional reactions to certain terms. A memo that refers to all the women in an office as “girls” or “chicks,” for example, may disturb its receivers so much that they fail to comprehend the total message.

## Feedback Travels to Sender

The verbal and nonverbal responses of the receiver create *feedback*, a vital part of the communication process. Feedback helps the sender know that the message was received and understood. If, as a receiver, you hear the message “How are you,” your feedback might consist of words (“I’m fine”) or body language (a smile or a wave of the hand). Although the receiver may respond with

**Predicting the effect of a message and adapting the message to a receiver are key factors in successful communication.**

**Encoding involves converting an idea into words or gestures that convey meaning.**

**Channels are the media—computer, telephone, fax, cell phone, letter, report, and so on—that transmit messages.**

**Decoding involves translating the message from symbol form into meaning.**

Asking questions encourages feedback that clarifies communication.

additional feedback to the sender (thus creating a new act of communication), we'll concentrate here on the initial message flowing to the receiver and the resulting feedback.

Senders can encourage feedback by asking questions such as, *Am I making myself clear?* and *Is there anything you don't understand?* Senders can further improve feedback by timing the delivery appropriately and by providing only as much information as the receiver can handle. Receivers can improve the process by paraphrasing the sender's message with comments, such as, *Let me try to explain that in my own words.* The best feedback is descriptive rather than evaluative. For example, here's a descriptive response: *I understand you want to launch a used golf ball business.* Here's an evaluative response: *Your business ideas are always goofy.* An evaluative response is judgmental and doesn't tell the sender whether the receiver actually understood the message.

## Overcoming Interpersonal Communication Barriers

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

Recognize barriers to interpersonal communication and examine specific strategies for overcoming those barriers.

The communication process is successful only when the receiver understands the message as intended by the sender. It sounds quite simple. Yet it is not. How many times have you thought that you delivered a clear message, only to learn later that your intentions were totally misunderstood? Most messages that we send reach their destination, but many are only partially understood.

Barriers to successful communication include bypassing, differing frames of reference, lack of language or listening skills, emotional interference, and physical distractions.

### Obstacles That Create Misunderstanding

You can improve your chances of communicating successfully by learning to recognize barriers that are known to disrupt the process. The most significant barriers for individuals are bypassing, differing frames of reference, lack of language skill, and distractions.

**Bypassing.** One of the biggest barriers to clear communication involves words. Each of us attaches a little bundle of meanings to every word, and these meanings are not always similar. *Bypassing* happens when people miss each other with their meanings.<sup>30</sup> Let's say your boss asks you to "help" with a large customer mailing. When you arrive to do your share, you learn that you are expected to do the whole mailing yourself. You and your boss attached different meanings to the word *help*. Bypassing can lead to major miscommunication because people assume that meanings are contained in words. Actually, meanings are in people. For communication to be successful, the receiver and sender must attach the same symbolic meanings to their words.

Miscommunication often results when the sender's frame of reference differs markedly from the receiver's.

**Differing Frames of Reference.** Another barrier to clear communication is your *frame of reference*. Everything you see and feel in the world is translated through your individual frame of reference. Your unique frame is formed by a combination of your experiences, education, culture, expectations, personality, and other elements. As a result, you bring your own biases and expectations to any communication situation. Because your frame of reference is totally different from everyone else's, you will never see things exactly as others do. American managers eager to reach an agreement with a Chinese parts supplier, for example, were disappointed with the slow negotiations process. The Chinese managers, on the other hand, were pleased that so much time had been taken to build personal relationships with the American managers. Wise business communicators strive to prevent miscommunication by being alert to both their own frames of reference and those of others. You will learn more about communicating across cultures in Chapter 3.

**Lack of Language Skill.** No matter how extraordinary the idea, it won't be understood or fully appreciated unless the communicators involved have good language skills. Each individual needs an adequate vocabulary, a command of basic punctuation and grammar, and skill in written and oral expression. Moreover, poor listening skills can prevent us from hearing oral messages clearly and thus responding properly.

**Distractions.** Other barriers include emotional interference, physical distractions, and digital interruptions. Shaping an intelligent message is difficult when one is feeling joy, fear, resentment, hostility, sadness, or some other strong emotion. To reduce the influence of emotions on communication, both senders and receivers should focus on the content of the message and try to remain objective. Physical distractions such as faulty acoustics,

noisy surroundings, or a poor cell phone connection can disrupt oral communication. Similarly, sloppy appearance, poor printing, careless formatting, and typographical or spelling errors can disrupt written messages. What's more, technology doesn't seem to be helping. Knowledge workers are increasingly distracted by multitasking, information overload, conflicting demands, and being constantly available digitally. Clear communication requires focusing on what is important and shutting out interruptions.<sup>31</sup>

## Overcoming Communication Obstacles

Careful communicators can conquer barriers in a number of ways. Half the battle in communicating successfully is recognizing that the entire process is sensitive and susceptible to breakdown. Like a defensive driver anticipating problems on the road, a good communicator anticipates problems in encoding, transmitting, and decoding a message. Effective communicators also focus on the receiver's environment and frame of reference. They ask themselves questions such as, *How is that individual likely to react to my message?* or *Does the receiver know as much about the subject as I do?*

Misunderstandings are less likely if you arrange your ideas logically and use words precisely. Mark Twain was right when he said, "The difference between an almost-right word and the right word is like the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." But communicating is more than expressing yourself well. A large part of successful communication is listening. Management advisor Peter Drucker observed that "too many executives think they are wonderful with people because they talk well. They don't realize that being wonderful with people means listening well."<sup>32</sup>

Effective communicators create an environment for useful feedback. In oral communication this means asking questions such as, *Do you understand?* and *What questions do you have?* as well as encouraging listeners to repeat instructions or paraphrase ideas. As a listener it means providing feedback that describes rather than evaluates. In written communication it means asking questions and providing access: *Do you have my phone numbers in case you have questions?* or *Here's my e-mail address so that you can give me your response immediately.*

## Communicating in Organizations

Until now, you've probably been thinking about the communication you do personally. But business communicators must also be concerned with the bigger picture, and that involves sharing information in organizations. On the job you will be sharing information by communicating internally and externally.

### Internal and External Functions

Internal communication includes exchanging ideas and messages with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates. When those messages must be written, you will probably choose e-mail (see Figure 1.5). When you are communicating externally with customers, suppliers, the government, and the public, you may send letters on company stationery (see the American Airlines letter in Figure 1.5 on page 16).

Some of the functions of internal communication are to issue and clarify procedures and policies, inform management of progress, develop new products and services, persuade employees or management to make changes or improvements, coordinate activities, and evaluate and reward employees. External functions involve answering inquiries about products or services, persuading customers to buy products or services, clarifying supplier specifications, issuing credit, collecting bills, responding to government agencies, and promoting a positive image of the organization.

In all of these tasks, employees and managers use a number of communication skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. As college students and workers, you probably realize that you need to raise these skills to the proficiency level required for success in today's knowledge society. This book and this course will provide you with practical advice on how to do just that.

### Spotlight on Communicators

Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao spoke not a word of English when she arrived in this country with her four sisters from her native Taiwan at the age of eight. Mastering the language and conquering other barriers, she became the first Asian-American woman ever to serve in a president's cabinet. In this role she makes frequent speeches before groups that may be supportive or hostile. She must adapt her message logically and use words precisely to prevent miscommunication. Whether addressing antagonistic union members or cheering female entrepreneurs, the personable yet fearless Chao overcomes communication obstacles by anticipating reactions, shaping her remarks to the audience, and being prepared to respond.



© Alex Wong / Getty Images

**To overcome obstacles, communicators must anticipate problems in encoding, transmitting, and decoding.**

**Good communicators ask questions to stimulate feedback.**

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

*Analyze the internal and external functions of communication in organizations as well as compare the advantages and disadvantages of oral and written communication.*

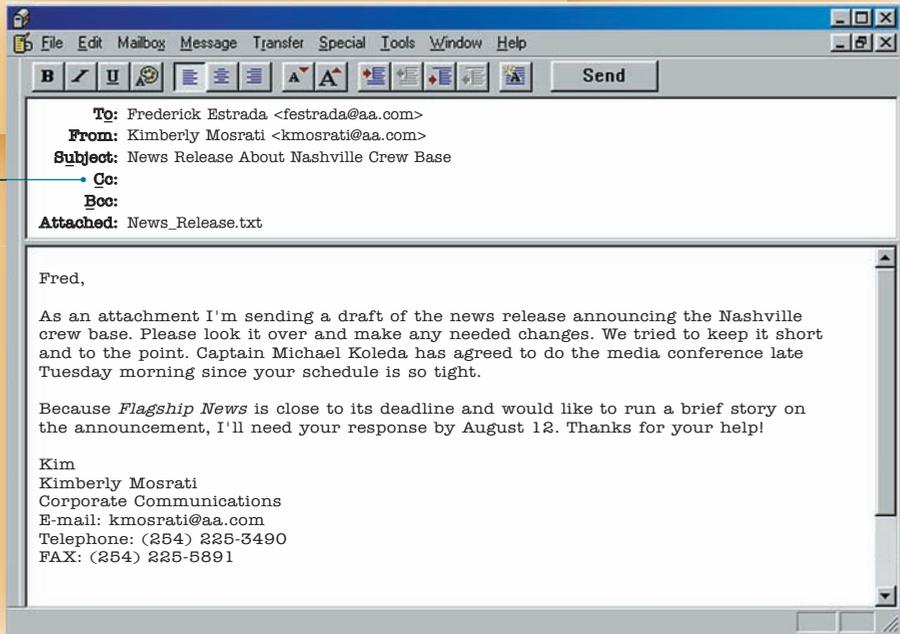
**Internal communication often consists of e-mail, memos, and voice messages; external communication generally consists of letters.**

**FIGURE 1.5** Internal and External Forms of Communication



Letters on company stationery communicate with outsiders. Notice how this one builds a solid relationship between American Airlines and a satisfied customer.

E-mail messages and printed memorandums typically deliver messages within organizations. They use a standardized format and are direct and concise.



**FIGURE 1.6** Functions of Business Communication

Now look back over the preceding discussion of internal and external functions of communication in organizations. Although there appear to be a large number of diverse business communication functions, they can be summarized in three simple categories, as Figure 1.6 shows: (a) to inform, (b) to persuade, and/or (c) to promote goodwill.

**Organizational communication has three basic functions: to inform, to persuade, and to promote goodwill.**

### Emphasis on Interactive, Mobile, and Instant Communication

The flattening of organizations coupled with the development of sophisticated information technology has greatly changed the way we communicate internally and externally. We are seeing a major shift away from one-sided, slow forms of communication, such as memos and letters to more interactive, fast-results communication. Speeding up the flow of communication are technologies such as e-mail, instant messaging (IM), text messaging, smart phones, voice mail, cell phones, and wireless fidelity (“Wi-Fi”) networks. Wi-Fi lets mobile workers connect to the Internet at ultrafast speeds without cables.

**Communication media are changing from one-sided, slow forms to more interactive, fast-results forms of communication.**

Illiana Raveh can’t imagine her life without instant and text messaging. An employee at a New York brokerage firm, Illiana uses IM to talk simultaneously with clients, colleagues, and friends. With IM, she can carry on six conversations at once, which helps her get her job done and serve clients better. *Instant messaging* is a type of communications service that allows you to create a private chat room to communicate in real time over the Internet. Typically, the instant messaging system alerts you when someone on your private list is online. *Text messaging* involves sending short text messages usually to a wireless device such as a cell phone or PDA.

Other forms of interactive communication include intranets (company versions of the Internet), Web sites, video transmission, and videoconferencing. You will be learning more about these forms of communication in coming chapters. Despite the range of interactive technologies, communicators are still working with two basic forms of communication: oral and written. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

### Oral Communication

Nearly everyone agrees that the best way to exchange information is orally in face-to-face conversations or meetings. Oral communication has many advantages. For one thing, it minimizes misunderstandings because communicators can immediately ask questions to clarify uncertainties. For another, it enables communicators to see each other’s facial expressions and hear voice inflections, further improving the process. Oral communication is also an efficient way to develop consensus when many people must be consulted. Finally, most of us enjoy face-to-face interpersonal communication because it is easy, feels warm and natural, and promotes friendships.

**Oral communication minimizes miscommunication but provides no written record.**

The main disadvantages of oral communication are that it produces no written record, sometimes wastes time, and may be inconvenient. When individuals meet face-to-face or speak on the telephone, someone’s work has to be interrupted. And how many of us are

**FIGURE 1.7** Forms of Organizational Communication

|                              | Forms                   | Advantages         | Disadvantages                                    |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>Oral Communication</b>    | Phone call              | Immediate feedback | No permanent record                              |
|                              | Conversation            | Nonverbal clues    | Expression may be careless or imprecise          |
|                              | Interview               | Warm feeling       | May be inappropriate for formal or complex ideas |
|                              | Meeting                 | Forceful impact    |  |
|                              | Conference              | Multiple input     |  |
| <b>Written Communication</b> | Announcement            | Permanent record   | Leaves paper trail                               |
|                              | E-mail, memo, fax       | Convenience        | Requires skill                                   |
|                              | Letter                  | Economy            | Requires effort                                  |
|                              | Report, proposal        | Careful message    | Lacks verbal cues                                |
|                              | Newsletter              | Easy distribution  | Seems impersonal                                 |
|                              | PowerPoint presentation |                    |  |
|                              | Résumé                  |                    |  |

able to limit a conversation to just business? Nevertheless, oral communication has many advantages. The forms and advantages of both oral and written communication are summarized in Figure 1.7.

### Written Communication

Written communication is impersonal in the sense that two communicators cannot see or hear each other and cannot provide immediate feedback. Most forms of business communication—including e-mail, announcements, memos, faxes, letters, newsletters, reports, proposals, manuals, presentations, and résumés—fall into this category.

Organizations rely on written communication for many reasons. It provides a permanent record, a necessity in these times of increasing litigation and extensive government regulation. Writing out an idea instead of delivering it orally enables communicators to develop an organized, well-considered message. Written documents are also convenient. They can be composed and read when the schedules of both communicators permit, and they can be reviewed if necessary.

Written messages have drawbacks, of course. They require careful preparation. Words spoken in conversation may soon be forgotten, but words committed to hard or soft copy become a public record—and sometimes an embarrassing or dangerous one. E-mail and text-messaging records, even deleted ones, have often become “smoking guns” in court cases, revealing insider information that was never meant for public consumption.<sup>33</sup>

Another drawback to written messages is that they are more difficult to prepare. They demand good writing skills, and we are not born with these skills. But writing proficiency can be learned. Because as much as 90 percent of all business transactions may involve written messages and because writing skills are so important to your business success, you will be receiving special instruction in becoming a good writer.

## Improving the Flow of Information in Organizations

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 6

*Examine critically the flow of communication in organizations including barriers and methods for overcoming those barriers.*

Information within organizations flows through formal and informal communication channels. A free exchange of information helps organizations respond rapidly to changing markets, boost efficiency and productivity, build employee morale, serve the public, and take full advantage of the ideas of today’s knowledge workers. Barriers, however, can obstruct the flow of communication, as summarized in Figure 1.8.

### Formal Channels

Formal channels of communication generally follow an organization’s hierarchy of command, as shown in Figure 1.9. Information about policies and procedures originates with

**Written communication provides a permanent record but lacks immediate feedback.**

**Written messages demand good writing skills, which can be developed through training.**

**Formal communication channels follow an organization’s chain of command.**

**FIGURE 1.8** Barriers Block the Flow of Communication in Organizations



executives and flows down through managers to supervisors and finally to lower-level employees. Many organizations have formulated official communication policies that encourage regular open communication, suggest means for achieving it, and spell out responsibilities. Official information among workers typically flows through formal channels in three directions: downward, upward, and horizontally.

**Downward Flow.** Information flowing downward generally moves from decision makers, including the CEO and managers, through the chain of command to workers. This information includes job plans, policies, and procedures. Managers also provide feedback about employee performance and instill a sense of mission in achieving the organization’s goals.

**Job plans, policies, instructions, feedback, and procedures flow downward from managers to employees.**

**Obstacles to Downward Information Flow.** One obstacle that can impede the downward flow of information is distortion resulting from long lines of communication. If, for example, the CEO in Figure 1.9 wanted to change an accounting procedure, she or he

**FIGURE 1.9** Formal Communication Channels



would probably not send a memo directly to the cost accountants who would implement the change. Instead, the CEO would relay the idea through proper formal channels—from the vice president for finance, to the accounting manager, to the senior accountant, and so on—until the message reached the affected employees. Obviously, the longer the lines of communication, the greater the chance that a message will be distorted.

**Improving Downward Information Flow.** To improve communication and to compete more effectively, many of today’s companies have restructured and reengineered themselves into smaller operating units and work teams. Rather than being bogged down with long communication chains, management speaks directly to team leaders, thus speeding up the entire process. Management is also improving the downward flow of information through newsletters, announcements, meetings, videos, blogs, webcasts, and company intranets. Instead of hoarding information at the top, today’s managers recognize the importance of letting workers know how well the company is doing and what new projects are planned.

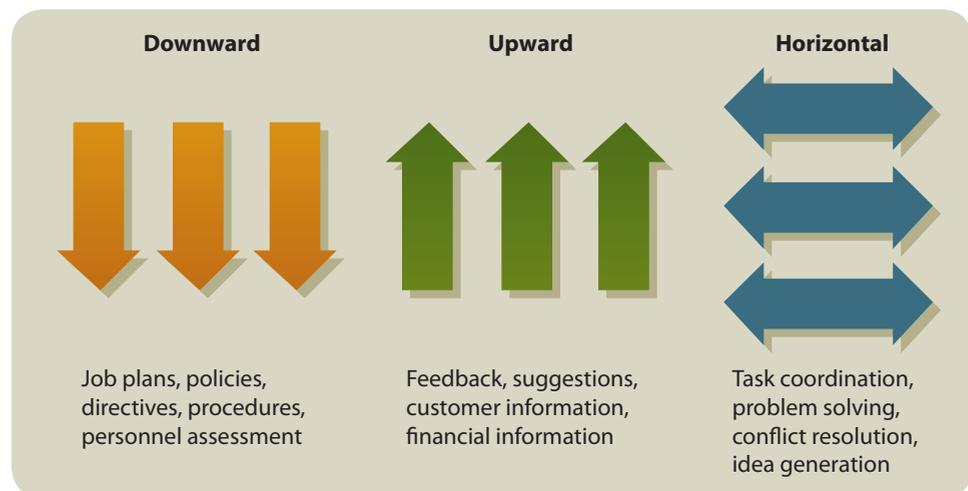
**Feedback from employees forms the upward flow of communication in most organizations.**

**Upward Flow.** Information flowing upward provides feedback from nonmanagement employees to management. Subordinate employees describe progress in completing tasks, report roadblocks encountered, and suggest methods for improving efficiency. Channels for upward communication include phone messages, e-mail, memos, reports, departmental meetings, and suggestion systems. Ideally, the heaviest flow of information should be upward with information being fed steadily to decision makers. Figure 1.10 summarizes the three directions of information flow within organizations.

**Obstacles to Upward Information Flow.** A number of obstacles can interrupt the upward flow of communication. Employees who distrust their employers are less likely to communicate openly. Employees cease trusting managers if they feel they are being tricked, manipulated, criticized, or treated unfairly. Unfortunately, some employees today no longer have a strong trusting attitude toward employers. Downsizing, cost-cutting measures, the use of temporary workers, discrimination and harassment suits, outrageous compensation packages for chief executives, and many other factors have lessened the feelings of trust and pride that employees once felt toward their employers and their jobs. Other obstacles include fear of reprisal for honest communication, lack of adequate communication skills, and differing frames of reference. Imperfect communication results when individuals are not using words or symbols with similar meanings, when they cannot express their ideas clearly, or when they come from different backgrounds.

**Improving Upward Information Flow.** To improve the upward flow of communication, some companies are (a) hiring communication coaches to train employees, (b) asking employees to report customer complaints, (c) encouraging regular meetings with staff, (d) providing a trusting, nonthreatening environment in which employees can comfortably share their observations and ideas with management, and (e) offering incentive programs that

**FIGURE 1.10** Organizational Information Flows in Three Directions



encourage employees to collect and share valuable feedback. Companies are also building trust by setting up hotlines for anonymous feedback to management and by installing *ombudsman* programs. An *ombudsman* is a mediator who hears employee complaints, investigates, and seeks to resolve problems fairly.

**Horizontal Flow.** Lateral channels transmit information horizontally among workers at the same level, such as between the training supervisor and maintenance supervisor in Figure 1.9. These channels enable individuals to coordinate tasks, share information, solve problems, and resolve conflicts. Horizontal communication takes place through personal contact, telephone, e-mail, memos, voice mail, and meetings. Most traditional organizations have few established regular channels for the horizontal exchange of information. Restructured companies with flattened hierarchies and team-based management, however, have discovered that when employees combine their knowledge with that of other employees, they can do their jobs better. Much information in these organizations travels horizontally among team members.<sup>34</sup>

**Obstacles to Horizontal Information Flow.** Obstacles to the horizontal flow of communication, as well as to upward and downward flow, include poor communication skills, prejudice, ego involvement, and turf wars. Some employees avoid sharing information if doing so might endanger their status or chances for promotion within the organization. Competition within units and an uneven reward system may also prevent workers from freely sharing information.

**Improving Horizontal Information Flow.** To improve horizontal communication, companies are (a) training employees in teamwork and communication techniques, (b) establishing reward systems based on team achievement rather than individual achievement, and (c) encouraging full participation in team functions. However, employees must also realize that they are personally responsible for making themselves heard, for really understanding what other people say, and for getting the information they need. Developing those business communication skills is exactly what this book and this course will do for you.

## Informal Channels

Not all information within an organization travels through formal channels. The *grapevine* is an informal channel of communication that carries organizationally relevant gossip.<sup>35</sup> This informal but powerful channel functions through social relationships in which individuals talk about work when they are having lunch, working out, golfing, carpooling, and, more recently, blogging. One writer called blogs “the grapevine on steroids.”<sup>36</sup>

Researchers studying communication flow within organizations know that the grapevine can be a powerful, pervasive source of information. In some organizations it can account for as much as two thirds of an employee’s information. Is this bad? Well, yes and no. The grapevine can be a fairly accurate and speedy source of organization information. Studies have demonstrated accuracy ratings of nearly 80 percent for many grapevine transmissions.<sup>37</sup> However, grapevine information is often incomplete because it travels in headlines: “Vice President Sacked” or “Jerk on the Fourth Floor Promoted.” When employees obtain most of their company news from the grapevine, management is not releasing sufficient information through formal channels. Managers can influence the grapevine by (a) respecting employees’ desire to know, (b) increasing the amount of information delivered through formal channels, (c) sharing bad as well as good news, (d) monitoring the grapevine, and (e) acting promptly to correct misinformation.<sup>38</sup>

The truth is that most employees want to know what’s going on. In fact, one study found that regardless of how much information organization members reported receiving, they wanted more.<sup>39</sup> Many companies today have moved away from a rigid authoritarian management structure in which only managers were allowed to see vital information, such as product success and profit figures. Employees who know the latest buzz feel like important members of the team.<sup>40</sup> Through formal lines of communication, smart companies are keeping employees informed. Thus, the grapevine is reduced to carrying gossip about who’s dating whom and what restaurant is cool for lunch.

**Workers coordinate tasks, share information, solve problems, and resolve conflicts through horizontal communication.**

### Ethics Check

#### Office Grapevine

Like a game of “telephone,” the grapevine can distort the original message because the news travels through many mouths and ears at the office. Knowing this, can you safely share with even a trusted colleague something that you would not comfortably discuss with everyone?

# Communicating at Work Part 2

## Sears Holdings

In taking over as CEO of both Sears Roebuck and Kmart, Aylwin Lewis faced many obstacles. Chief among them was combining two retail giants, resurrecting famous brand names (such as Kenmore, Diehard, Craftsman, Lands' End, and Martha Stewart), and finding ways to exploit newfound connections between the two chains.

Since the merger, Lewis has worked tirelessly to establish the framework for a new culture. He and his staff have restructured work flows to enable store employees to spend less time in back rooms and more time interacting with customers. In another move, Lewis required all 3,800 Sears headquarters employees to spend at least a day working in a store, which many had never done. Practicing what he preached, Lewis made frequent store visits, announced and unannounced. Sometimes he even worked alongside clerks. Other times he watched and listened, asking managers what they needed to improve store operations.<sup>41</sup>

Lewis realizes that both Sears and Kmart need to be turned around. Thus far, he says, "we have improved dramatically in terms of housekeeping standards, uniform standards, and presentation standards. I'm proud of that stuff, but at the same time we're still not best-in-class."<sup>42</sup> Lewis faces the daunting task of breathing new life

into Kmart and Sears, two down-at-the-heels chains having trouble competing with Target and Wal-Mart. "Make no mistake," he told managers. "We have to change."

### Critical Thinking

- In communicating the changes he wants to make at Sears and Kmart, should CEO Aylwin Lewis use formal or informal channels of communication? Give examples of each.
- In the midst of many organizational changes at Sears and Kmart, what kinds of messages do you think will be traveling downward, upward, and horizontally?
- What kinds of barriers block the flow of communication in any organization undergoing massive changes?



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## Examining Business Communication Ethics

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 7

*Understand the ethical goals of a business communicator and tools for doing the right thing.*

As a business communicator, you should understand basic ethical principles so that you can make logical decisions when faced with dilemmas in the workplace. Professionals in any field must deal with moral dilemmas on the job. However, just being a moral person and having sound personal ethics may not be sufficient to handle the ethical issues that you may face in the workplace. Consider the following ethical dilemmas:

**E-mail message.** You accidentally receive a message outlining your company's restructuring plan. You see that your coworker's job will be eliminated. He and his wife are about to purchase a new home. Should you tell him that his job is in danger?

**Customer letter.** You are writing a letter to a customer who is irate over a mistake you made. Should you blame it on a computer glitch, point the finger at another department, or take the blame and risk losing this customer's goodwill and possibly your job?

**Progress report.** Should you write a report that ignores problems in a project, as your boss asks? Your boss controls your performance evaluation.

**Sales report.** Should you inflate sales figures so that your team can meet its quarterly goal? Your team leader strongly urges you to do so, and you receive a healthy bonus if your team meets its goal.

**Presentation.** You are rushing to prepare a presentation. On the Web you find perfect wording and great graphics. Should you lift the graphics and wording but change a few words? You figure that if it is on the Web, it must be in the public domain.

**Proposal.** Your company urgently needs a revenue-producing project. Should you submit a proposal that unrealistically suggests a short completion schedule to ensure that you get the job?

**Résumé.** Should you inflate your grade-point average or give yourself more experience or a higher job title than your experience warrants to make your résumé more attractive? The job market is very competitive.

On the job you will face many dilemmas, and you will want to react ethically. But what is ethical behavior? Ethics author Mary E. Guy defined ethics as “that behavior which is the *right* thing to do, given the circumstances.”<sup>43</sup> Determining the right thing to do, however, is not always an easy task. No solid rules guide us. For some people, following the law is enough. Anything legal must be ethical. Most people, however, believe that ethical standards rise to a higher level. What are those standards? Although many ethical dilemmas have no “right” answer, one solution is often better than another. In deciding on that solution, keep in mind the goals of ethical business communicators.

## Goals of Ethical Business Communicators

Taking ethics into consideration can be painful in the short term. But in the long term, ethical behavior makes sense and pays off. Dealing honestly with colleagues and customers develops trust and builds stronger relationships. Many businesses today recognize that ethical practices make good business sense. Ethical companies endure less litigation, less resentment, and less government regulation. The following guidelines can help you set specific ethical goals. Although the following goals hardly constitute a formal code of conduct, they will help you maintain a high ethical standard.

**Abiding by the Law.** Know the laws in your field and follow them. Particularly important for business communicators are issues of copyright law. Under the concept of *fair use*, individuals have limited rights to use copyrighted material without requiring permission. To be safe, one should assume that anything produced privately after 1989—including words, charts, graphs, photos, music—is copyrighted. By the way, don’t assume that Internet items are in the “public domain” and free to be used. Internet items are also covered by copyright laws. If you are in accounting, financial management, investing, or corporate management, you should be aware of the restrictions set forth by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, officially known as the ‘Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act of 2002.’ Whatever your field, become familiar with its regulations.

**Telling the Truth.** Ethical business communicators do not intentionally make statements that are untrue or deceptive. We become aware of dishonesty in business when violators break laws, notably in advertising, packaging, and marketing. The Federal Trade Commission, for example, charged Stouffer Foods with misrepresentation for its claim that Lean Cuisine entrees always contain less than 1 gram of sodium. In a fine-print footnote, careful consumers learn that 1 gram is equivalent to 1,000 milligrams, which is the commonly used unit of measurement for sodium.<sup>44</sup> The FTC also has cracked down on the makers of exercise equipment, such as Abflex, because three minutes a day on the “ab” machine doesn’t come close to producing a “washboard stomach,” as the manufacturer claimed.<sup>45</sup> You will learn more about what is legal in sales promotions in Chapter 9.

**Labeling Opinions.** Sensitive communicators know the difference between facts and opinions. Facts are verifiable and often are quantifiable; opinions are beliefs held with confidence but without substantiation. It is a fact, for example, that women are starting businesses at two times the rate of men.<sup>46</sup> It is an opinion, though, that the so-called “glass ceiling” has held women back in business organizations with the result that women are forced to start their own businesses. It is a fact that many companies are developing teams as tools to achieve management objectives. It is an opinion that teams are more effective in solving problems than individuals. Stating opinions as if they were facts is unethical.

**Being Objective.** Ethical business communicators recognize their own biases and strive to keep them from distorting a message. Suppose you are asked to investigate laptop computers and write a report recommending a brand for your office. As you visit stores, you discover that an old high school friend is selling Brand X. Because you always liked this individual and have faith in his judgment, you may be inclined to tilt your recommendation in his direction. However, it is unethical to misrepresent the facts in your report or to put a spin on your arguments based on friendship. To be ethical, you could note in your report that you have known the person for ten years and that you respect his opinion. In this way, you have

**Ethical behavior involves doing the right thing given the circumstances.**

**Goals of ethical communicators include abiding by the law, telling the truth, labeling opinions, being objective, communicating clearly, and giving credit.**

**Facts are verifiable; opinions are beliefs held with conviction.**

**“Plain English” laws require simple, understandable language in policies, contracts, warranties, and other documents.**

disclosed your relationship as well as the reasons for your decision. Honest reporting means presenting the whole picture and relating all facts fairly.

**Communicating Clearly.** Ethical business communicators feel an obligation to write clearly so that receivers understand easily and quickly. Some states have even passed “Plain English” laws that require businesses to write policies, warranties, and contracts in language comprehensible to average readers. Plain English means short sentences, simple words, and clear organization. Communicators who intentionally obscure their meaning with long sentences and difficult words are being unethical.

**Using Inclusive Language.** Strive to use language that includes rather than excludes. Do not use expressions that discriminate against individuals or groups on the basis of their sex, ethnicity, disability, or age. Language is discriminatory when it stereotypes, insults, or excludes people. You will learn more about how to use inclusive, bias-free language in Chapter 4.

**Giving Credit.** Ethical communicators give credit for ideas by (a) referring to originators’ names within the text; (b) using quotation marks; and (c) documenting sources with endnotes, footnotes, or internal references. You will learn how to do this in Chapter 12 and Appendix C. Don’t suggest that you did all the work on a project if you had help. In school or on the job, stealing ideas, words, graphics, or any other original material is unethical.

Members of the International Association of Business Communicators have developed a code of ethics with 12 guidelines (articles) that spell out criteria for determining what is right and wrong for members of its organization. You can see the IABC Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators at <http://www.iabc.com/about/code.htm>.

## Tools for Doing the Right Thing

In composing messages or engaging in other activities on the job, business communicators can’t help being torn by conflicting loyalties. Do we tell the truth and risk our jobs? Do we show loyalty to friends even if it means bending the rules? Should we be tactful or totally honest? Is it our duty to make a profit or to be socially responsible? Acting ethically means doing the right thing given the circumstances. Each set of circumstances requires analyzing issues, evaluating choices, and acting responsibly.

Scandal erupted when Hewlett-Packard board member George Keyworth was caught leaking confidential information to newspapers about HP’s corporate strategy. The business scandal widened when it was revealed that methods used to uncover the leaks at the iconic American company included “pretexting”—illegal data mining of phone records—as well as the tracking of e-mails and instant messages. Investigations forced Keyworth’s resignation and led to the high-profile indictment of Patricia Dunn, the company’s influential former chairwoman. *What ethics tools can help business leaders do the right thing?*



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Resolving ethical issues is never easy, but the task can be made less difficult if you know how to identify key issues. The following questions may be helpful.

- **Is the action you are considering legal?** No matter who asks you to do it or how important you feel the result will be, avoid anything that is prohibited by law. Giving a kickback to a buyer for a large order is illegal, even if you suspect that others in your field do it and you know that without the kickback you will lose the sale.
- **How would you see the problem if you were on the opposite side?** Looking at all sides of an issue helps you gain perspective. Consider the issue of mandatory drug testing among employees. From management's viewpoint such testing could stop drug abuse, improve job performance, and lower health insurance premiums. From the employees' viewpoint mandatory testing reflects a lack of trust of employees and constitutes an invasion of privacy. By weighing both sides of the issue, you can arrive at a more equitable solution.
- **What are alternate solutions?** Consider all dimensions of other options. Would the alternative be more ethical? Under the circumstances, is the alternative feasible? Can an alternate solution be implemented with a minimum of disruption and with a good possibility of success? Let's say you wrote a report about testing a new product, but your boss changed the report to distort the findings. Should you go to the head of the company and reveal that the report is inaccurate? A more tactful alternative would be to approach your boss and ask whether you misunderstood the report's findings or whether an error might have been made.
- **Can you discuss the problem with someone whose advice you trust?** Suppose you feel ethically bound to report accurate information to a client even though your manager has ordered you not to do so. Talking about your dilemma with a coworker or with a colleague in your field might give you helpful insights and lead to possible alternatives.
- **How would you feel if your family, friends, employer, or coworkers learned of your action?** If the thought of revealing your action publicly produces cold sweats, your choice is probably unwise. Losing the faith of your friends or the confidence of your customers is not worth whatever short-term gains might be realized.

Perhaps the best advice in ethical matters is contained in the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. The ultimate solution to all ethics problems is treating others fairly and doing what is right to achieve what is good. In succeeding chapters you will find additional discussions of ethical questions as they relate to relevant topics.

## Whistleblowing: Ethical and Legal Responsibilities

In a perfect world, you would work only for organizations that recognize that good ethics is good business. Wrongdoing, however, does occur in business, as newspaper headlines continually remind us. What if you find yourself in a situation in which you feel that someone in your organization is acting illegally or immorally? When you agree to be hired by an organization, you are agreeing to be loyal to that organization—as long as the organization is not involved in serious wrongdoing. If you do detect serious lapses, do you blow the whistle or protect your job by minding your own business?

*Whistleblowing* in the workplace is defined as "the reporting, by employees or ex-employees, of wrongdoing such as fraud, malpractice, mismanagement, breach of health and safety law, or any other illegal or unethical act, either on the part of management or by fellow employees."<sup>47</sup> The Sarbanes-Oxley Act institutes significant protections for whistleblowers. However, many workers are still reluctant to report unethical activities.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes it is a difficult judgment call. As an internal auditor, you might look at the numbers and decide that your company is charging the government appropriately. You could, however, look at the numbers differently and decide that your company is seriously overcharging the government. Figures can be interpreted differently.

If you do decide that something is amiss, how can you go about blowing the whistle legally and ethically? First, be certain that you have your facts straight. Don't rely on gossip or

**Business communicators can help resolve ethical issues through self-examination.**

**Discussing an ethical problem with a coworker or colleague might lead to helpful alternatives.**

# Communicating at Work Your Turn

## Applying Your Skills at Sears Holdings

In combining Sears Roebuck and Kmart, CEO Aylwin Lewis recognized that he needed to develop potential leaders in the company to assist in carrying out his mission to transform the troubled retailers.

In rising to the top, Lewis developed his own leadership qualities, including speaking and listening skills. Once a month he listens on the store complaint line and actually answers customer complaints for an hour. Listening to employees is also important. "I gave a speech once about nine years ago," he explained, "and a comment came back from someone at the company that I gave four closings and that it was really long. Since then, if I have 30 minutes to speak, I give them a 22-minute speech. I used to write my speeches out completely and memorize them. Now I put an outline together and address key points, more of a conversation."<sup>49</sup>

Lewis is called a great communicator, and his oratory skills attest to that. But he is also recognized as a skilled people person with a knack for making others comfortable while motivating them to improve.<sup>50</sup> Coworkers in the restaurant business began to call him "Coach." Relying on his oratory, coaching, and leadership skills, Lewis faces a momentous task in conveying his vision to restore luster to Sears Roebuck and Kmart, two struggling retail chains.

### Your Task

As an intern at Sears Holdings, you are part of a leadership training group. In your training, your manager asks you and fellow interns to prepare a list of communication skills that you think are important to leadership success. What skills are important for initial hiring? How can these skills be identified among applicants? What skills are important for promotion? Are they the same? Why? Your intern manager also wants to know whether you think communication and leadership skills can be taught on the job. In teams of three to five, discuss these questions. Summarize your conclusions and (a) appoint one team representative to report to the class or (b) write individual memos or e-mails describing your conclusions. (See Chapter 7 and Appendix B for tips on writing memos.)



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speculation. Second, try to correct the matter inside the company. Instead of going outside, speak to your supervisor, if at all possible. You may be able to talk with someone else whom you trust and decide on a course of action.

All whistleblowers must weigh the personal risks involved. If you decide that you can't change a situation or if you disagree with a company policy, consider changing jobs.

## Summary of Learning Objectives

**1 Understand the importance of communication skills in relation to career success; and explain the need for thinking critically, taking charge of your career, and strengthening your communication skills.** Communication skills are critical to job placement, performance, career advancement, and organizational success. These skills include reading, listening, speaking, and writing. They are not inherent; they must be learned. Writing skills are particularly important because messages today travel more rapidly, more often, and to greater numbers of people than ever before. In today's dynamic workplace you can expect to be a knowledge worker; that is, you will deal with words, figures, and data. You must learn to think critically and develop opinions backed by reasons and evidence. Because technologies and procedures are constantly evolving, you must be flexible and willing to engage in lifelong learning. You should expect to take charge of your career as you work for multiple employers. The most important foundation skill for knowledge workers is the ability to communicate. You can improve your skills by studying the principles, processes, and products of communication provided in this book and in this course.

**2 Recognize significant changes in today's workplace and how these changes increase the need for excellent communication skills.** The workplace is undergoing profound changes, such as the emergence of heightened global competition, flattened management hierarchies, expanded team-based management, innovative communication technologies, new work environments, and an increasingly diverse workforce. Nearly all of these changes require that businesspeople have strong communication skills to be able to make decisions, exchange information, and stay connected with remote colleagues.

**3 Analyze the process of communication and how to engage it effectively.** The sender encodes (selects) words or symbols to express an idea. The message is sent verbally over a channel (such as a letter, e-mail message, or telephone call) or is expressed nonverbally,

perhaps with gestures or body language. “Noise”—such as loud sounds, misspelled words, or other distractions—may interfere with the transmission. The receiver decodes (interprets) the message and attempts to make sense of it. The receiver responds with feedback, informing the sender of the effectiveness of the message. The objective of communication is the transmission of meaning so that a receiver understands a message as intended by the sender.

**4 Recognize barriers to interpersonal communication and examine specific strategies for overcoming those barriers.** *Bypassing* causes miscommunication because people have different meanings for the words they use. *One’s frame of reference* creates a filter through which all ideas are screened, sometimes causing distortion and lack of objectivity. *Weak language skills* as well as *poor listening skills* impair communication efforts. *Emotional interference*—joy, fear, anger, and so forth—hampers the sending and receiving of messages. *Physical distractions*—noisy surroundings, faulty acoustics, and so forth—can disrupt oral communication. Multitasking, information overload, and being constantly available digitally also make it difficult to focus. You can reduce or overcome many interpersonal communication barriers if you (a) realize that the communication process is imperfect, (b) adapt your message to the receiver, (c) improve your language and listening skills, (d) question your preconceptions, (e) plan for feedback, (f) focus on what is important, and (g) shut out interruptions.

**5 Analyze the internal and external functions of communication in organizations as well as compare the advantages and disadvantages of oral and written communication.** Internal functions of communication include issuing and clarifying procedures and policies, informing management of progress, persuading others to make changes or improvements, and interacting with employees. External functions of communication include answering inquiries about products or services, persuading customers to buy products or services, clarifying supplier specifications, and so forth. Oral, face-to-face communication is most effective, but written communication is often more expedient.

**6 Examine critically the flow of communication in organizations including barriers and methods for overcoming those barriers.** Formal channels of communication follow an organization’s hierarchy of command. Information flows downward from management to workers. Long lines of communication tend to distort information. Many organizations are improving the downward flow of communication through newsletters, announcements, meetings, videos, and company intranets. Information flows upward from employees to management, thus providing vital feedback for decision makers. Obstacles include mistrust, fear of reprisal for honest communication, lack of adequate communication skills, and differing frames of reference. To improve upward flow, companies are improving relations with staff, offering incentive programs that encourage employees to share valuable feedback, and investing in communication training programs. Horizontal communication is among workers at the same level. Obstacles include poor communication skills, prejudice, ego involvement, competition, and turf wars. Techniques for overcoming the obstacles include (a) training employees in communication and teamwork techniques, (b) establishing reward systems, and (c) encouraging full participation in team functions. Informal channels of communication, such as the grapevine, deliver unofficial news—both personal and organizational—among friends and coworkers.

**7 Understand the ethical goals of a business communicator and tools for doing the right thing.** The goals of ethical business communicators include abiding by the law, telling the truth, labeling opinions, being objective, communicating clearly, using inclusive language, and giving credit. When faced with a difficult decision, the following questions serve as valuable tools in guiding you to do the right thing: (a) Is the action you are considering legal? (b) How would you see the problem if you were on the opposite side? (c) What are alternate solutions? (d) Can you discuss the problem with someone whose advice you trust? (e) How would you feel if your family, friends, employer, or coworkers learned of your action? If faced with serious wrongdoing on the job, ethical business communicators may be forced to become whistleblowers.

## Chapter Review

1. Why are writing skills more important than ever in today's workplace? (Obj. 1)
2. Are communication skills inborn or must they be learned? (Obj. 1)
3. Who are knowledge workers? Why are they hired? (Obj. 1)
4. Name five factors that are creating significant changes in today's workplace. (Obj. 2)
5. What electronic tools enable workers to complete tasks in remote locations? Why are communication skills increasingly important? (Obj. 2)
6. Define *communication* and explain its most critical factor. (Obj. 3)
7. Describe the five steps in the process of communication. (Obj. 3)
8. Describe four interpersonal communication barriers that can create misunderstanding. (Obj. 4)
9. What are the three main functions of organizational communication? (Obj. 5)
10. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of oral, face-to-face communication. (Obj. 5)
11. Compare formal and informal channels of communication within organizations. Which is more valuable to employees? (Obj. 6)
12. Who is generally involved and what information is typically carried in downward, upward, and horizontal communication channels? (Obj. 6)
13. What are seven goals of ethical business communicators? (Obj. 7)
14. When you are faced with a difficult ethical decision, what questions should you ask yourself? (Obj. 7)
15. What is whistleblowing? How can one engage in it legally and ethically? (Obj. 7)

## Critical Thinking

1. Why should you, as a business student and communicator, strive to improve your communication skills; and why is it difficult or impossible to do so on your own? (Obj. 1)
2. Recall a time when you experienced a problem as a result of poor communication. What were the causes of and possible remedies for the problem? (Objs. 3, 4)
3. Critics complain that e-mail is reducing the amount of face-to-face communication at work and this is bad for business. Do you agree or disagree? (Objs. 3–5)
4. How are the rules of ethical behavior that govern businesses different from those that govern your personal behavior? (Obj. 7)
5. **Ethical Issue:** Suppose your superior asked you to alter year-end financial data, and you knew that if you didn't you might lose your job. What would you do if it were a small amount? A large amount? (Obj. 7)

## Activities

### 1.1 Online Communication Skills Assessment: How Do You Rate? (Objs. 1–3)

Web

This course can help you dramatically improve your business communication skills. How much do you need to improve? This assessment exercise enables you to evaluate your skills with specific standards in four critical communication skill areas: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. How well you communicate will be an important factor in your future career—particularly if you are promoted into management, as many college graduates are.

**Your Task.** Either here or online at [www.meguffey.com](http://www.meguffey.com), select a number from 1 (indicating low ability) to 5 (indicating high ability) that best reflects your perception of yourself. Be honest in rating yourself. Think about how others would rate you. When you finish, see a rating of your skills. Complete this assessment online to see your results automatically!

| <b>Writing Skills</b>  | <b>Low</b> | <b>High</b> |
|--|------------|-------------|
| 1. Possess basic spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills                                 | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 2. Am familiar with proper e-mail, memo, letter, and report formats for business documents | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 3. Can analyze a writing problem and quickly outline a plan for solving the problem        | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 4. Am able to organize data coherently and logically                                       | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 5. Can evaluate a document to determine its probable success                               | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |

### Reading Skills

|  | <b>Low</b> | <b>High</b> |
|--|------------|-------------|
| 1. Am familiar with specialized vocabulary in my field as well as general vocabulary | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 2. Can concentrate despite distractions  | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 3. Am willing to look up definitions whenever necessary                              | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 4. Am able to move from recreational to serious reading                              | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |
| 5. Can read and comprehend college-level material                                    | 1          | 2 3 4 5     |

### Speaking Skills

|   |   |         |
|---|---|---------|
| 1. Feel at ease in speaking with friends                    | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Feel at ease in speaking before a group of people        | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Can adapt my presentation to the audience                | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Am confident in pronouncing and using words correctly    | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. Sense that I have credibility when I make a presentation | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |

### Listening Skills

|  |   |         |
|--|---|---------|
| 1. Spend at least half the time listening during conversations                 | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Am able to concentrate on a speaker's words despite distractions            | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Can summarize a speaker's ideas and anticipate what's coming during pauses  | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Provide proper feedback such as nodding, paraphrasing, and asking questions | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |

5. Listen with the expectation of gaining new ideas and information 1 2 3 4 5

Total your score in each section. How do you rate?

- 22–24 Excellent! You have indicated that you have exceptional communication skills.
- 18–21 Your score is above average, but you could improve your skills.
- 14–17 Your score suggests that you have much room for improvement.
- 10–13 You recognize that you need serious study, practice, and follow-up reinforcement.

Where are you strongest and weakest? Are you satisfied with your present skills? The first step to improvement is recognition of a need. The second step is making a commitment to improve. The third step is following through, and this course will help you do that.

## 1.2 Collaborating on the Opening Case Study (Objs. 1–5)

Team

Web

Each chapter contains a three-part case study of a well-known company. To help you develop collaboration and speaking skills as well as to learn about the target company and apply the chapter concepts, your instructor may ask you to do the following.

**Your Task.** Individually or as part of a three-student team during your course, work on one of the 16 case studies in the textbook. Answer the questions posed in all parts of the case study, look for additional information in articles or Web sites, complete the application assignment, and then make a five- to ten-minute presentation to the class with your findings and reactions.

## 1.3 Getting to Know You (Objs. 1, 2)

E-Mail

Your instructor wants to know more about you, your motivation for taking this course, your career goals, and your writing skills.

**Your Task.** Send an e-mail or write a memo of introduction to your instructor. See Appendix B for memo formats and Chapter 7 for tips on preparing an e-mail message. In your message include the following:

- Your reasons for taking this class
- Your career goals (both temporary and long-term)
- A brief description of your employment, if any, and your favorite activities
- An assessment and discussion of your current communication skills, including your strengths and weaknesses

## 1.4 Small-Group Presentation: Getting to Know Each Other (Objs. 1, 2)

Team

Many business organizations today use teams to accomplish their goals. To help you develop speaking, listening, and teamwork skills, your instructor may assign team projects. One of the first jobs in any team is selecting members and becoming acquainted.

**Your Task.** Your instructor will divide your class into small groups or teams. At your instructor's direction, either (a) interview another group member and introduce that person to the group or (b) introduce yourself to the group. Think of this as an informal interview for a team assignment or for a job. You will want to make notes from which to speak. Your introduction should include information such as the following:

- Where did you grow up?
- What work and extracurricular activities have you engaged in?
- What are your interests and talents? What are you good at doing?

- What have you achieved?
- How familiar are you with various computer technologies?
- What are your professional and personal goals? Where do you expect to be five years from now?

To develop listening skills, team members should practice good listening techniques (see Chapter 2) and take notes. They should be prepared to discuss three important facts as well as remember details about each speaker.

## 1.5 Communication Skills: Analyzing the Want Ads (Obj. 1)

Team

Web

What do employers request when they list job openings in your field?

**Your Task.** Individually or in teams, check the listings at an on-line job board. Visit a job board such as Monster, College Recruiter, Career Builder, or Yahoo! Top Jobs. Use your favorite search engine to locate their sites. Follow the instructions to search job categories and locations. Study the jobs listed. Find five or more job listings in your field. If possible, print the results of your search. If you cannot print, make notes on what you find. Study the skills requested. How often do the ads mention communication, teamwork, and computer skills? What tasks do the ads mention? Discuss your findings with your team members. Prepare a list of the most frequently requested skills. Your instructor may ask you to submit your findings and/or report to the class. If you are not satisfied with the job selection at this site, choose another job board.

## 1.6 Workplace Writing: Separating Myths From Facts (Obj. 1)

Today's knowledge workers are doing more writing on the job than ever before. Flattened management hierarchies, heightened global competition, expanded team-based management, and heavy reliance on e-mail have all contributed to more written messages.

**Your Task.** In teams or in class, discuss the following statements. Are they myths or facts?

- Because I'm in a technical field, I will work with numbers, not words.
- Secretaries will clean up my writing problems.
- Technical writers do most of the real writing on the job.
- Computers can fix any of my writing mistakes.
- I can use form letters for most messages.

## 1.7 Communication Skills: CompUSA Suddenly Needs Writers (Objs. 1–3)

Team

"One misspelled word and customers begin to doubt the validity of the information they are getting," warns Mary Jo Lichtenberg. She's director of training, quality, and career development at CompUSA, in Plano, Texas. One of her big problems is training service agents with weak communication skills. "Just because agents understand technically how to troubleshoot computers or pieces of software and can walk customers through solutions extremely well over the telephone doesn't mean they can do the same in writing," she complains. "The skill set for phone does not necessarily translate to the skill set needed for writing e-mail." With more than 200 superstores, CompUSA is a leading retailer and reseller of computer hardware and software. As more and more of its customers choose e-mail and Web chat sessions to obtain service and support, CompUSA service reps are doing more writing.<sup>51</sup>

**Your Task.** In teams, discuss what communication skills are necessary for service agents troubleshooting computers and software at CompUSA. How are the skill sets different for answering phones and for writing e-mail responses? What suggestions could you make to Lichtenberg as director of training?

### 1.8 Communication Process: Avoiding Misunderstanding (Obj. 3)

Communication is not successful unless the receiver understands the message as the sender meant it.

**Your Task.** Analyze the following examples of communication failures. What went wrong?

- The editor of Salt Lake City's *Deseret News* told his staff to "change the picture" of film icon James Dean, who had a cigarette dangling from his lips. The staff thought that the editor wanted the cigarette digitally removed from the picture, which they did. When published, the altered picture drew considerable criticism. The editor later explained that he had expected the staff to find a new picture.
- Team leader Tyson said to team member Alicia, "I could really use your help in answering these customer inquiries." Later Alicia was resentful when she found that he expected her to answer all the inquiries herself.
- A supervisor issued the following announcement: "Effective immediately the charge for copying services in Repro will be raised 5 to 8 cents each." Receivers scratched their heads.
- A China Airways flight, operating in zero visibility, crashed into the side of a mountain shortly after takeoff. The pilot's last words were "What does *pull up* mean?"
- Skiers in an Austrian hotel saw the following sign in English: "Not to perambulate the corridors in the hours of repose in the boots of ascension."
- The following statements actually appeared in letters of application for an advertised job opening. One applicant wrote, "Enclosed is my résumé in response to Sunday's New York Times." Another wrote, "Enclosed is my résumé in response to my search for an editorial/creative position." Still another wrote, "My experience in the production of newsletters, magazines, directories, and online data bases puts me head and shoulders above the crowd of applicants you have no doubtedly been inundated with."

### 1.9 Miscommunication in Organizations: Understanding the Boss (Objs. 3–6)

#### Team

Sales representative Tim Perez was underperforming. However, the vice president was unaware of this. At a busy sales reception where all of the sales reps were milling about, the CEO pulled the vice president aside and said, "Why is Perez still a sales rep?" The vice president assumed the CEO wanted Perez promoted. Unwilling to question the CEO, the vice president soon thereafter sent down orders to promote Perez. Later, when the CEO learned what had happened, he "came out of his chair like a Saturn rocket." He meant to say, "Why is that guy still on the payroll?"<sup>52</sup>

**Your Task.** In teams, discuss the factors contributing to this miscommunication. What went wrong in the process of communication? What role did feedback play?

### 1.10 Differing Frames of Reference: E-Mail Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding (Obj. 4)

#### Intercultural

A cultural misunderstanding nearly derailed an Indo-Japanese bridge-building project. An Indian firm sent a detailed list of technical

questions to its Japanese counterpart. The Indian engineers panicked when they received no reply. They wondered what had happened. Was the deal off? A week later, the Japanese engineers responded. Unlike in India or in the United States, the Japanese encourage input from everyone involved in a project. The queries probably went to the heads of different departments so that a complete picture could be presented in the response. In the United States and in India, businesspeople expect an immediate response of some sort from e-mails.<sup>53</sup>

**Your Task.** Discuss how differing frames of reference affected this misunderstanding. How could such misunderstandings be averted?

### 1.11 Document for Analysis: Barriers to Communication (Objs. 3–5)

The following memo is from an exasperated manager to her staff. Obviously, this manager has no secretary to clean up her writing.

**Your Task.** Comment on the memo's effectiveness, tone, and potential barriers to communication. Your instructor may ask you to revise the memo, improving its tone, grammar, and organization.

DATE: Current  
TO: All Employees  
FROM: Albertina Sindaha, Operations Manager  
SUBJECT: Cleanup!

You were all suppose to clean up your work areas last Friday, but that didn't happen. A few people cleaned their desks, but no one pitched in to clean the common areas, and you all saw what a mess they were in!

So we're going to try again. As you know, we don't have a big enough custodial budget anymore. Everyone must clean up himself. This Friday I want to see action in the copy machine area, things like emptying waste baskets and you should organize paper and toner supplies. The lunch room is a disaster area. You must do something about the counters, the refrigerator, the sinks, and the coffee machine. And any food left in the refrigerator on Friday afternoon should be thrown out because it stinks by Monday. Finally, the office supply shelves should be straightened.

If you can't do a better job this Friday, I will have to assign individuals to a specific cleaning schedule. Which I don't want to do. But you may force me to.

### 1.12 Information Flow: What's the Latest Buzz? (Obj. 6)

All organizations provide information to the public and to members through official channels. But information also flows through unofficial channels.

**Your Task.** Consider an organization to which you belong or a business where you've worked. How did members learn what was going on in the organization? What kind of information flowed through formal channels? What were those channels? What kind of information was delivered through informal channels? Was the grapevine as accurate as official channels? What barriers obstructed the flow of information? How could the flow be improved?

### 1.13 Workplace Ethics: Where Do You Stand? (Obj. 7)

#### Ethics

How do your ethics compare with those of workers across the country?

**Your Task.** Answer *yes* or *no* to each item in the following *Wall Street Journal* workplace ethics quiz.<sup>54</sup> Be prepared to discuss your responses in class. At the end of this chapter you can see how others responded to this quiz.

- Is it wrong to use company e-mail for personal reasons?
- Is it wrong to use office equipment to help your children or spouse do schoolwork?
- Is it wrong to play computer games on office equipment during the workday?
- Is it wrong to use office equipment to do Internet shopping?

5. Is it unethical to blame an error you made on a technological glitch?
6. Is it unethical to visit pornographic Web sites using office equipment?
7. Is a \$50 gift to a boss unacceptable?
8. Is a \$50 gift FROM the boss unacceptable?
9. Is it OK to take a \$200 pair of football tickets from a supplier?
10. Is it OK to accept a \$75 prize won at a raffle at a supplier's conference?

### 1.14 Does White-Collar Crime Pay? (Obj. 7)

Ethics

Web

You've been asked to participate in a panel discussing white-collar crime. Some people argue that executives seldom serve prison time for white-collar crime. You think that high-profile people have actually been sentenced to prison.

**Your Task.** Using the Web or a campus database, look for ammunition for your position. Try to find at least five examples of individuals who have been sentenced for corporate wrongdoing. What did they do, and what penalty did they receive? Be sure to document your sources, including author, title, publication, date, and page. If you wish to expand your topic, examine companies that have paid fines, suffered bad press, or been forced into bankruptcy for corporate malfeasance. Remember to choose good search terms to return good results. Try *white-collar crime* and *corporate scandals*, along with other search terms. Discuss your findings in class or in a memo to your instructor. Can you draw any conclusions from your findings?

### 1.15 Ethical Dilemmas: Applying Tools for Doing the Right Thing (Obj. 7)

Ethics

As a business communicator, you may face various ethical dilemmas in your career. Many factors can determine your choice of an action to take.

**Your Task.** Study the seven dilemmas appearing on page 22 [e-mail message, customer letter, progress report, etc.]. Select four of them and apply the Tools for Doing the Right Thing on page 25 in choosing an appropriate action. In a memo to your instructor or in a team discussion, explain the action you would take for each dilemma. Analyze your response to each question (Is the action you are considering legal? How would you see the problem if you were on the opposite side? And so forth).

### 1.16 Developing Critical Thinking and Consumer Skills: A Victim of Identity Theft Wants Your Help (Obj. 1)

Consumer

Your friend Lisa Williams, whose banking experience consisted mainly of ATM use, knew something was wrong when a Citibank debt consolidation representative called her. Lisa was astounded to learn that she had an overdue credit card balance of \$4,600. Impossible! she thought. She didn't even own a Citibank credit card! Unfortunately, Lisa is one of more than 27 million Americans who have been victimized by fraud or identity theft in the past five years.<sup>55</sup>

**Your Task.** Lisa asks you to help her through this mess. Using the critical-thinking steps outlined in this chapter and listed here, decide on a problem-solving strategy. At the same time, learn more about identity theft for your own protection. To find information, search the Web or use a campus database. Answer the following questions in a class discussion or in a memo to your instructor. (See Chapter 7 and Appendix B for information about writing memos.)

1. **Identify and clarify the problem.** How do banks issue credit cards? What information is needed? How is it verified? How do identity thieves get your personal information?



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2. **Gather information.** Should Lisa ask Citibank for its application record for this fraudulent card? How can you learn more about identity theft in general?
3. **Evaluate the evidence.** Should Lisa investigate this herself or involve the police? Should she go to credit bureaus (Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion) and ask for their help in clearing her credit record?
4. **Consider alternatives and implications.** What actions can a victim of identity theft take?
5. **Choose and implement the best alternative.** What should Lisa do first, and what follow-up actions should she take? How can people reduce the chances of identity theft?

### Video Resources

**Video Library 1.** *Building Workplace Skills* presents five videos that introduce and reinforce concepts in selected chapters. These excellent tools ease the learning load by demonstrating chapter-specific material to strengthen your comprehension and retention of key ideas.

The recommended video for this chapter is *Communication Foundations*, which illustrates how strong communication skills can help you advance your career in today's challenging world of work. Be prepared to discuss critical-thinking questions your instructor may provide.

### Responses to the Wall Street Journal Workplace Ethics Quiz in Activity 1.13

1. Thirty-four percent said using company e-mail for personal reasons is wrong.
2. Thirty-seven percent said using office equipment to help your children or spouse do schoolwork is wrong.
3. Forty-nine percent said playing computer games at work is wrong.
4. Fifty-four percent said using office equipment to do Internet shopping is wrong.
5. Sixty-one percent said blaming your own error on faulty technology is unethical.
6. Eighty-seven percent said visiting pornographic Web sites using office equipment is unethical.
7. Thirty-five percent said making a \$50 gift to a boss is unacceptable.
8. Thirty-five percent said accepting a \$50 gift from the boss is unacceptable.
9. Seventy percent said accepting a \$200 pair of football tickets from a supplier is unacceptable.
10. Forty percent said accepting a \$75 prize won at a raffle at a supplier's conference is unacceptable.

# Grammar and Mechanics Skills With C.L.U.E.

Each chapter includes an exercise based on Appendix A: Grammar and Mechanics: Competent Language Usage Essentials (C.L.U.E.). This appendix is a business communicator's condensed guide to language usage, covering 50 of the most used and abused language elements. It also includes a list of frequently misspelled words as well as a list of confusing words. The first ten exercises presented with each chapter will systematically focus on specific grammar/mechanics guidelines. The last six chapter exercises will cover all the guidelines plus spelling and confusing words.

## Sentence Structure

Study sentence structure in Guides 1–3 of Appendix A beginning on page A-2. Each of the following sentences has one sentence fault. On a sheet of paper, write a correct version and identify which guide is violated. Avoid adding new phrases or rewriting sentences in your own words. You may need to change or delete one or more words. However, your goal is to correct the sentence with as few marks as possible. When finished, compare your responses with the key beginning on page Key-1.

1. To succeed as a knowledge worker in today's digital workplace. You need highly developed communication skills.

2. Companies are looking for individuals with strong writing and grammar skills. Because employees spend at least 50 percent of their time processing documents.
3. Businesses are cutting costs they are eliminating many layers of management.
4. Knowledge workers may be distracted by multitasking, however clear communication requires shutting out interruptions.
5. Face-to-face conversations have many advantages. Even though they produce no written record and sometimes waste time.
6. The grapevine can be a major source of information, it is also fairly reliable.
7. Knowledge workers must be critical thinkers they must be able to make decisions and communicate those decisions.
8. Management uses many methods to distribute information downward. Such as newsletters, announcements, meetings, videos, and company intranets.
9. Ethical companies experience less litigation, they also receive less resentment and less government regulation.
10. Horizontal communication starts with coworkers downward communication starts with decision makers.