Interpersonal communication—essential to fundraising—requires relational skills not usually associated with other types of communication. An understanding of relational communication skills can help fundraisers achieve greater success.

Quality communication in achieving fundraising excellence

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AT THE ANNUAL Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) workshop—where Richard Matheny, Shirley Peppers, and I teach communication skills in major donor fundraising—conferees regularly ask "What should I say in order to secure a gift?" They want to know how to "make the ask," and the more specific the answer the better. A casual review of articles appearing in CASE's *Currents* reveals similar concerns. Typical articles address such topics as "the art of asking," "popping the question," "getting to the point," "face to face," even "eyeball to eyeball." Our conferees' questions and these articles reflect a popular perception of successful communicators, that they possess specific technical skills that lead to success.

The average person's view of successful communicators would undoubtedly also include the need to keep an audience's attention and interest and the importance of relevant, timely, and reasonably complete information. Sound reasoning, careful organization, and some standard of good presentation or delivery would fill out the picture. These perceptions are common, because the tradition of public speaking, whether or not in decline or transition, is an integral part of Western civilization and of our particular democratic institutions.

Scope of communication
Communication as a field of study has changed rather dramatically in this century. Public speaking is no longer its focus, and forms unheard of in previous times have appeared. Mass communication, in electronic and print forms, has saturated our society. As the population has exploded and our life spans have grown, interpersonal communication has emerged to address the needs of people in ongoing relationships. Traditional forms of persuasion have come under fire, and the need for cooperation and collaboration has increased (Peck, 1987). In the face of change, there is a risk of retaining outmoded perceptions of how to proceed. This is particularly true of what constitutes excellent communication. The assumption that the standards for success as a public speaker may be readily transferred to other forms of communication is questionable.

On considering modern interaction, especially in such ongoing relationships as families, it is apparent that having the latest data, organizing a presentation carefully, and choosing one's words for a special effect are out of place as criteria for success. Are these really the things that bring success in one-on-one, face-to-face communication? Experience indicates that they are not, but we do not immediately think of what things are important. However, before we proceed further, let us examine the communication

of fundraisers, who are the focus of this book. What form of communication is most characteristic of fundraising?

Fundraising communication

Fundamental to most fundraising activity is its relational nature. People do not give money either to strangers or to unknown causes. Even con men and scam artists succeed by establishing apparently personal relationships for themselves and their causes with their victims. The fundraiser must collect information about a potential donor before making an initial contact. Passing that sometimes difficult threshold, the fundraiser must cultivate the prospect, among other things finding areas of common interest and exploring areas of potential support. In so doing, he or she cannot keep the relationship purely objective or confine it to business. Philanthropy is a self-actualizing act (Maslow, 1943), and not one to be entered into objectively like buying a car. The steps described are identical to those followed by people in the development of relationships in general (Knapp and Vangelisti, 1992). For example, the beginning stages of most relationships follow an information-collecting phase, during which time one may observe another indirectly or ask a mutual acquaintance about the other. Next come initiating steps, during which time one acquaints oneself with another through very superficial communication. The relative impersonality of such openings as "Hello. How are you?" permits one to assess the potential for more serious interaction without risking too much if indifference is the response. Provided the initial transaction is OK, most relationships move to an experimenting stage where one explores possible bases of common interest. Relational steps such as these depend less on an exchange of objective information than on an investment by both parties of themselves. In fundraising, one must also develop a genuine personal, not just business, relationship first.

One often hears in fundraising circles such truisms as "people give to people" and "all successful fundraising comes out of a relationship." These are truisms because people do not give fully or best of their resources through media campaigns or the salesmanship appeals of public speakers. They give most fully and most happily to someone who has taken the time and exhibited the concern to develop something akin to friendship with them, someone whom they like, trust, and feel comfortable with, someone whom they know will still be in a relationship with them even after they have made a gift. Quite clearly, the type of communication in virtually all fundraising is interpersonal communication.

Communication in relationships

Interpersonal communication does not work like other forms of communication. Perhaps the most obvious way in which this is true is that it shifts the emphasis away from the *individual* and to the *pair* or *dyad.* In interpersonal communication, there is no clear-cut speaker or sender, and no listener or receiver. Interpersonal partners are both of these simultaneously. There is no message or speech in the usual sense. Instead, there are the turn-taking exchanges we generally call everyday conversation. There is no clear-cut sending receiving dichotomy. When face-to-face, one talks and the other

communicates nonverbally at the same time. Feedback and feedback monitoring assume a much more central role than in either mass or public communication. Finally, the more intimate nature of interpersonal communication introduces new dimensions of an emotional or affective sort. It is not merely the content of the transaction that is relevant but also the status of the relationship itself (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967). Indeed, Mehrabian (1981) has stressed that fully 93 percent of the emotional impact of one person on another comes from nonverbal messages.

When two people are drawn together in a relationship, there are inevitable tensions created. These tensions are absent when we act alone. However, when we take on the additional responsibility of partnership, self-orientation must give way to some extent in consideration of the other person. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967), for example, identify it to be axiomatic that all pairs of people will structure their relationship in some way that for them resolves the issue of who is "in charge." Other writers also identify the issue as one of power or control (Schutz, 1960; Burgoon and Hale, 1984). In some relationships, one partner will pay the bills while the other buys the groceries. Such relational structures are said to be complementary. In other relationships, the partners may pay the bills and buy the groceries together and would form a symmetrical relational structure. Whatever the chosen solution, it is clear that taking on a partner raises the issue of relational tension.

Relational tensions are not necessarily unhealthy. They simply arise out of the fact that no two people are identical. These tensions result from the struggle to form a "we" or "us" out of a "me" and a "you" and to recognize that one cannot have a relationship and maintain full-blown individuality. Baxter (1988, 1990) has identified the three most typical struggles as autonomy/connection, openness/closedness, and predictability/novelty. The most crucial battle in most relationships is between maintaining individual identity and sharing areas of common ground with the partner. In fundraising, there is often a desire to keep the relationship with a potential donor from getting too personal, to keep things on a businesslike level. However, without connection no interpersonal relationship will thrive.

Openness/willingness to disclose personal information to one's partner is also necessary for relational success. Like connection, openness moves a relationship out of the realm of the shallow and impersonal. Indeed, self-disclosure is the method most frequently cited as the way to move a relationship through its successive stages. Openness operates on a norm of reciprocity in that one disclosure generally evokes a similar disclosure from the partner, thus running relational development.

Finally, Baxter suggests that relationships need predictability. Partners need to know what to expect from each other, so that trust and security may develop. Of course, one cannot nor should not abandon autonomy completely. Neither can one always be open except in the most intimate of relationships, and novelty is often necessary to enliven a relationship gone sour. The important thing about Baxter's analysis is that it emphasizes and clarifies for us the dynamics of interpersonal communication. It is not

like other forms of communication. It is not impersonal but embraces social emotional dimensions of the people involved. It reminds us that if we are to understand the nature of quality in such communication we must look beyond traditional horizons. With the foregoing characteristics in mind, we may turn our attention to what is different about the communication we see in relationships.

Distinctiveness of interpersonal communication
Public speaking and mass communication share an emphasis on a clearly identifiable speaker or message sender. In interpersonal communication, there is no such person or function. Interpersonal communication is a two-person or dyadic phenomenon. Partners share responsibility for sending messages. Public speaking and mass communication also emphasize a distinct message destination or audience of receivers. In interpersonal communication, there is no such target, and partners also share responsibility for listening, including paying attention to nonverbal cues. Public speaking and mass communication are highly focused on message, with this carefully crafted message usually intended to accomplish some specific goal like persuasion. The messages in interpersonal communication are informal or conversational. They are purposive, to be sure, but they evolve out of the give-and-take or turn-taking of interaction. Interpersonal communication is, therefore, feedback centered. Much public speaking and mass communication is rather impersonal. While the welfare of the audience is often on a speaker's mind, there is usually nothing at stake relationally. For interpersonal communicators, however, the relationship itself is at stake as surely as is whatever the message content happens to be.

Perhaps the most pervasive contribution of Watzlawick, Beavin; and Jackson (1967) to the understanding of interpersonal communication is an emphasis on the relational implications of every message. What this means is that within a relationship, all communication is both about something, or has content, and affects the relationship's climate, or is relational. There are of course numerous examples of this extra, relational dimension of communication in everyday life. A friend speaks to you in the hallway and smiles animatedly. The boss asks if you "have a few minutes" with a scowl. Your four-year-old daughter tells you her doll is broken, and a tear rolls down her cheek. We know that in relationships the nonverbal accompaniment is significant, not only because we value the relationship as well as the message content, but because it is the key to knowing the status of the relationship. We know that for the good of the relationship, the nonverbal message has far greater import. It is obvious then that to discuss quality communication in relationships, one must assess the means by which people communicate in this affective, relational dimension. Although it is fashionable to speak about reading nonverbal behavior, the need is greater than that. It extends to an assessment of what personal aspects are influenced by nonverbal behavior and how the process works, and also includes an assessment of what changes occur in the verbal area of relational communication.

Interpersonal communication competence

Fortunately, there is a substantial body of research on the nature of interpersonal communication competence (Knapp, Ellis, and Williams, 1980; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977). Moreover, every one of the many beginning textbooks in the field includes some discussion of competence (Adler and Towne, 1993; Canary and Cody, 1994; Weaver, 1990). Wiemann's seminal research study (1977) is a very widely cited synthesis of the most important aspects of this body of literature, providing what might be considered a look at competence from the perspective of the fundraiser. A similarly significant study is Knapp, Ellis, and Williams's research (1980) on perceptions of good relational communication. This study shows competence more from the perspective of the potential donor. Because of the dyadic nature of interpersonal communication, these two studies do not contrast in their approach so much as they provide complementary views. The following discussions are paraphrases first of Wiemann's then of Knapp, Ellis, and Williams's studies along with an interpretation of these studies in terms of fundraising.

Perspective of the fundraiser

In Wiemann's study, five basic factors account for quality communication in relationships. These are affiliation/support, social relaxation, empathy, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management. Consistent with the analysis presented here, Wiemann stresses that "competence must be viewed as a dyadic concept" (p. 391). He rejects the idea of judging communication success in terms of achieving one's goals, but also dismisses the notion of selflessness or complete other-orientation. Wiemann says that "the competent communicator is the person who can have his [or her] way in the relationship while maintaining a mutually acceptable definition of that relationship" (p. 394). At this point, there is an absolutely crucial implication for fundraisers. The temptation to try to achieve one's goal of obtaining a gift must be countered with the need to preserve the prospective donor's personhood. As Wiemann puts it, "the person who is considered `effective' by the `I had my way' criterion is really incompetent if the relationship is terminated because the other party in it could not live with a self-definition of `loser'" (p. 394). Five dimensions of behavior are important in light of this mutuality criterion.

Affiliation/Support. In quality interpersonal communication, one must make an effort to show one's affiliation with and support of the other person. Affiliation and support are basic to connection and openness. The means are both nonverbal and verbal. Considering nonverbal means first, eye behavior, specifically, making and maintaining good eye contact, indicates to others our desire to be associated with them. Eye contact also conveys interest in the other person's communication and our general level of attention. Peck (1978) maintains that it is through eye contact that we know others love us. Affiliation and support may also be shown through such other nonverbal behaviors as head nods, pleasant facial expressions such as smiling, and physical closeness during interaction. Verbally, we indicate affiliation by using language appropriate to our relational status. If the other person is our superior, we say "Mr. Jones," "Dr. Smith," or "Your honor." If the other is a peer, we use nicknames or first names. We also refrain

from talking too much at a time, and we take responsibility for the perceptions we form of the other.

Social Relaxation. Establishing a climate of relaxation when communicating with another is a crucial step. Generally, a communicator puts another at ease when he or she demonstrates ease. In most interpersonal communication situations, modeling of behavior takes place, so that one individual imitates the behavior of another. Relaxation cues include rocking movements, leg and foot movements, and body lean. A deliberate and moderate speech rate is preferable to being too fast or too slow. Some nonfluencies and hesitations are normal, but many of these signify tension and may result in the other being put off or in evaluating the speaker as low in credibility (Miller and Hewgill, 1964). Social relaxation enhances connectedness and provides a climate conducive to openness.

Empathy. Empathy is the act of putting oneself in another's shoes so as to see things the way the other does. Virtually irrelevant to the lone individual, empathy is perhaps the very marrow of relationships. For example, how can there be connection without empathy? Would not the partners continually miss the mark with each other? And, of course, empathy and openness go hand in glove. Openness provides the material of empathy, and empathy encourages the risk taking inherent in disclosure. Finally, empathy underlies predictability. When we really know another, surprises are rare. The capacity for empathy is present in all of us, although some people have done little to develop it. Role-playing games show clearly that we all possess the knowledge and the ability to put ourselves in another's shoes. Mostly, we lack the will. In communication, we can begin to demonstrate empathy by reciprocating the affective (emotional) behaviors of the other through smiling, eye contact, and forward leaning. We can reflect back verbally, saying things like, "I know how you feel." We can also give appropriate head nods and such verbal reinforcers as "un-hunh" to indicate we are truly listening.

Behavioral Flexibility. One of the truisms of interpersonal communication is that every relationship is unique, because of course no two people are truly alike. Not only is this the case, it is a truism that all communication situations are in some sense different. In consequence of these variations, an effective interpersonal communicator will need to develop many different behaviors and to notice the situational cues that suggest which to choose in the particular case. Behavioral flexibility means monitoring oneself in terms of the situation. It does not mean learning to be "all things to all men" but rather "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." It implies the need for a repertoire of communication behaviors that would allow one to develop equally satisfactory relationships with people as different as the young Japanese scion of the family that founded Seiko, Inc. and the aging oil tycoon whose interests in later life tend toward nutrition and longevity. As may be evident, behavioral flexibility is not visibly different from affiliation and support, social relaxation, and empathy. Instead, it is demonstrated by a wide range of these behaviors and the alternation of them to fit the circumstances.

Interaction Management. Whereas the previous four dimensions of quality interpersonal communication revolve around observable communicative behaviors, interaction management is a matter of knowing the rules of interpersonal communication exchanges and following them. Communication rules are just like other socially conditioned behaviors and are acquired the same way. We learn social rules, such as "it is not polite to begin eating until everyone has been served," by casual but regular observation of our surroundings. To be sure, parents and teachers are often explicit about rules we should follow, but society in general also inculcates them indirectly.

And what are the rules that an astute and observant communicator knows about how to manage interaction? Wiemann mentions the five most common. First, one cannot interrupt the speaker. Second, only one person may talk at a time. Third, speaker turns must alternate or interchange. Fourth, frequent or long pauses are inappropriate. Fifth, both parties should be assured that the other is devoting his or her undivided attention. Such rules as these seem painfully obvious when printed on a page, because they are so tightly woven into our social makeup. However, not everyone behaves according to his or her knowledge at all times. We tire, our attention wanders, our willfulness leads us astray. But it is clear how necessary such basic courtesies as are embodied in just these rules are to the maintenance of a relationship. Connection, openness, and predictability would all be adversely affected by their absence.

Perspective of the potential donor
Wiemann's research provides a framework for considering quality communication for fundraising excellence from the standpoint of what the fundraiser can do. However, it is also illuminating to consider the question of effective communication from the standpoint of the potential donor. What is the other person looking for in a fundraiser's presentation? Of course, he or she is looking for the five dimensions discussed above, but from another perspective he or she is seeking a situation characterized by certain general patterns. To see what these patterns are, we may draw on the research of Knapp, Ellis, and Williams (1980) on people's perceptions of quality interpersonal communication. These researchers found one general and eight specific categories of communicative behavior. The general category was defined simply by the statement "We talk to each other frequently." At its very base, quality interpersonal communication requires frequency. A fundraiser is not likely to have much of a relationship with a prospective donor without seeing him or her often. It is that simple.

Uniqueness of Interaction. Among specific categories, the first is uniqueness of interaction. This quality is defined by such things as sharing words that have a special meaning just within the dyad and sensing the other's feeling without having to be told. It is similar to Wiemann's affiliation/support. Whatever the means, people perceive a dyad to be valuable and to work well when it seems unique. Security in the dyad breeds ease of fundraising talk.

Depth and Breadth of Interaction. Similarly, depth of interaction and breadth of interaction are important. Sharing secrets and feelings and being open in general

with each other define depth. Depth is most characteristic of intimate relationships. However, every stage of relational development requires some disclosure. Without appropriate disclosure, the relationship just stops growing. Breadth comes from having a large number of topics to talk about with each other. With regard to breadth, the good fundraiser must have many interests and be widely read. Decades ago, such a person was called a good conversationalist. While this designation is no longer in vogue, the need for the quality itself continues. One simply meets too many different types of people in fundraising not to develop a wide acquaintance with conversational topics.

Ease, Flexibility, and Smoothness of Interaction. Difficult interaction is characteristic of poor-quality interpersonal communication. It includes communication breakdowns, trouble with understanding, and lack of attention. No relationship can function smoothly without ease of communication, certainly not a fundraising one. But an absence of difficult interaction is not enough. To ease in communication must be added flexibility. Just as Wiemann noted, quality communication requires adjustment to the situation, knowing when to speak and when to communicate nonverbally, when to express one's pleasure or displeasure and when not to. And there must also be smoothness of interaction. Strain, awkwardness, and effort are inappropriate. People desire coordination, similarity of communication style, and effortlessness.

Spontaneity and Evaluation in Interaction. Spontaneity of interaction and evaluation in interaction complete the list of specific categories. Spontaneity implies informality and relaxation. Hesitancies and undue caution about what one should say are undesirable, as is the need to choose one's words carefully. Finally, good-quality interpersonal communication includes the open expression of both praise and criticism of the other. It also means telling the other when we like and dislike things the other has done. So people have rather specific perceptions about what they expect of good relational communication and describe it rather explicitly by these nine categories.

Achieving quality communication
Developing communication skills for fundraising excellence is at once an easy and a difficult task. It is easy because all of us have been communicating since birth and already have a vast repertoire of skills available. Most fundraisers were hired by people who knew what to look for in the way of communication skills and selected personnel who were already more than merely competent. Finally, those who would seek a profession such as fundraising have an awareness of their own abilities in light of the job's communication demands. So those who are or who would be fundraisers are closer to the goal of quality communication than the average person.

Communication skill development is hard, because improvement rests on our attitudes, values, and beliefs more than on our abilities. There are, for example, few people who are truly bad listeners, who actually lack the ability to listen. For most of us, good listening is a matter of choosing deliberately what we already know is right. For some, good listening may require adjusting attitudes toward the speaker or the speaker's topic. For still others, good listening means valuing the speaker as much as oneself. Such

skills as are required for good communication are not hard to acquire in the sense an algebra equation is. Each of us already has most of them: Instead, they are hard to select, because we have to decide that they are worth using in a particular case.

A review of the five major dimensions of interpersonal communication competence and the nine categories of good relational communication serves to provide a template with which to craft quality communication. Not knowing what constitutes effectiveness in a relationship might well lead to an incorrect set of choices. To be sure, one can frequently observe dyadic communicators who make presentations rather than converse, who look down instead of at the speaker, or who interrupt the potential donor. However, correcting these faults is not a matter of acquiring new skills nor is it even one of improving old ones. It is a matter of choosing the correct ones to use out of the host of available alternatives.

For most people, reading and understanding the five skill dimensions and the nine categories will be sufficient. For them, read and do are the operative verbs. For others, however, some assistance may be required. For this purpose, an observant and knowledgeable friend might be invaluable. Asking such a person to accompany you and to observe your communication behaviors firsthand may be necessary to identify areas for development.

Another very useful and effective strategy, and one used in many large development offices, is the periodic role-playing session using actual case studies. Professionals like Richard Matheny, of the University of California, Davis, are devoted practitioners of this approach. Richard has his fundraising staff critique each other as well as play the roles of development officer, potential donor, and so on. Richard, Shirley Peppers of the Harvard University West Coast Development Office, and I have also used this technique in our annual training sessions for CASE. These training methods have proven very successful for us. Sometimes we have also used camcorders to tape the role-playing sessions and to provide the basis for an in-depth assessment and critique session. With the increasing availability of video equipment, almost no one needs to strike out on his or her own.

For those few who do operate pretty much alone, it is very possible to monitor behavior while in the actual fundraising setting. Simply jot down the elements of the five communication skill dimensions or the nine categories on a sheet of paper, then take a moment after a session to review the interaction and to do a bit of self-evaluation. For almost everyone who would be successful in fundraising, though, there is a need to keep one fundamental principle of relationships foremost in mind. In relationships, getting your own way is not the goal. Instead, the goal is maintaining the relationship. Those who set goals for fundraisers as well as those who must meet them still must not forget that fundraising is at its heart a relational activity

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