

Metropolitan Police Academy



5.3 Four Pillars of Communication

Introduction

Law enforcement officers are called upon to intervene in the problems of other people on a daily basis. Many of the situations that law enforcement officers confront can be resolved through effective communication. Communicating is the fundamental avenue of sharing and exchanging information. Not surprisingly, the more skilled officers are at interacting with the public, the more effective and productive they may be and the less likely they are to generate complaints or lawsuits. There are four pillars of communication based on the needs of the department: Interpersonal, Community, Customer Service, and De-Escalation. These pillars will be the foundation of every interaction you have with a community member.

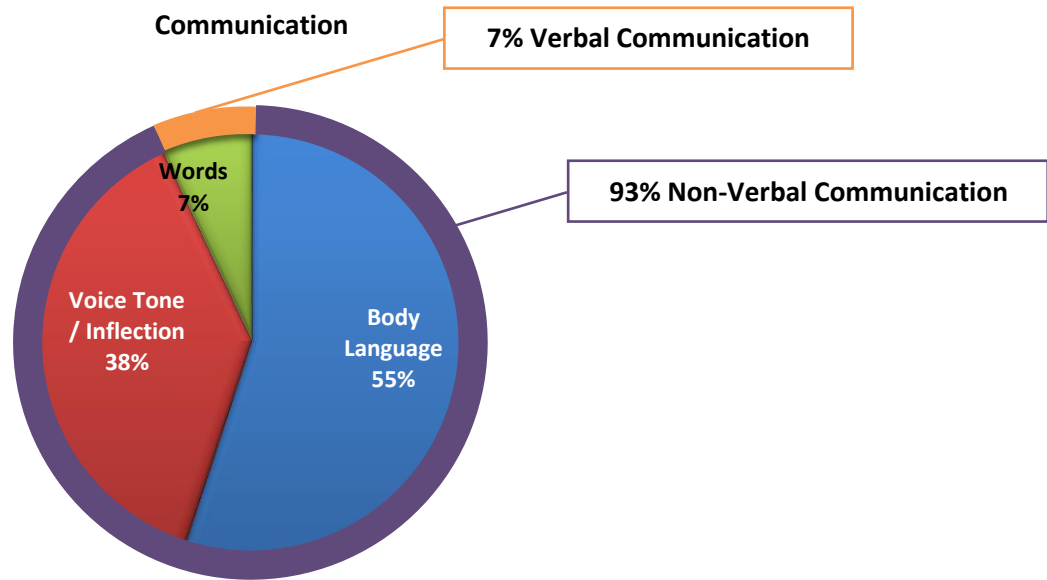
Members need to be effective in accepting and giving information. Any breakdown or lack of communication can not only potentially escalate a situation or irritate those involved but could also lead to a potential safety concern or dangerous situation. As an officer, it is your job to not only engage and communicate with community members effectively, but also to give clear and effective commands when the particular situation at hand dictates. In addition, a police officer must also be able to receive communications effectively through the process of active listening.

5.3.1 Key words to discuss

- Verbal Communication - Commands
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Chain of Command
- Tactical Communication – Radio Communication
- Emotion Management
- Professional Demeanor
- Body Language
- Barriers in Communication
- Active Listening
- Customer Service
- Communication with Partner
- Communication with Technology
- Criticism/Feedback/Direction
- Attitude
- Commitment

5.3.2 Identify the types of communication

Communication is the act of conveying a message through both **verbal** and **non-verbal** means. According to Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology at UCLA, 93% of communication is non-verbal. This includes body language, which makes up 55% of communication, and the tone and inflection of one's voice, which makes up 38% of communication. The last 7% of communication is left to the words that are actually spoken. These percentages are shown in the figure on the next page.



What does this mean? It truly means that it is not what you say but *how* you say it. How people say something through non-verbal communication can provoke a strong emotional reaction, which can be either positive or negative.

5.3.3 Identify the elements of non-verbal communication

The first scientific research on non-verbal communication was conducted in 1872 by Charles Darwin. He published his findings in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Since then, a significant amount of research has been conducted on the types, effects, and expressions of unspoken communication and behavior. Non-verbal communication plays a significant part in our understanding of face-to-face communication. Since 1872, research has identified several different types of non-verbal communication. Today we will discuss a few of those types.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are responsible for a portion of nonverbal communication. Consider how much information can be conveyed with just a smile or a frown. The look on a person's face is often the first thing someone else sees, even before hearing what he or she has to say.

While non-verbal communication and behavior can vary dramatically between cultures, the facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger, and fear are similar throughout the world.

Gestures

Deliberate movements and signals are an important way to communicate meaning without using words. Common gestures include waving, pointing, and using fingers to indicate numeric amounts. Other gestures can be arbitrary and related to culture.

In courtroom settings, lawyers have been known to utilize different nonverbal signals to attempt to sway juror opinions. For example, an attorney might glance at his watch to suggest that the opposing lawyer's argument is tedious or might even roll his eyes at the testimony offered by an opposing witness in an

attempt to undermine his or her credibility. Such non-verbal signals are considered so powerful and influential that some judges even place limits on what type of non-verbal behaviors are allowed in the courtroom.

Paralinguistics

Paralinguistics refers to vocal communication that is separate from actual language. It includes tone of voice, volume (loudness or softness), inflection, and pitch. Consider the powerful effect that the tone of voice can have on the meaning of a sentence. When said in a strong tone of voice, listeners might interpret approval and enthusiasm. The same words said in a hesitant tone of voice might be heard to convey disapproval and a lack of interest.

Consider the different ways that simply changing your tone of voice might change the meaning of a sentence. A friend might ask you how you are doing, and you might respond with the standard "I'm fine," but how you actually say those words might reveal a tremendous amount of how you are really feeling. A cold tone of voice might suggest that you are actually not fine, but you do not wish to discuss it. A bright, happy tone of voice will reveal that you are actually doing quite well. A somber, downcast tone would indicate that you are the opposite of fine and that perhaps your friend should inquire further.

Body Language and Posture

Posture and movement can also convey a great deal of information. Research on body language has grown significantly since the 1970s and has focused on defensive postures, arm crossing, and leg crossing. While these non-verbal behaviors can indicate feelings and attitudes, research suggests that significant body language can also be more subtle. For example, the self-touch gestures (e.g., rubbing one's hands together or the rubbing of arms, thighs, or the face, and even resting one's thumbs in one's pockets or belt loops) are often indicators of an attempt to comfort oneself or to relieve or release stress during high-stress situations.

Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the amount of space and relative positioning of individuals during an interpersonal communication situation.

People often refer to their need for "personal space," which is an important type of non-verbal communication. The amount of distance we feel we need and the amount of space we perceive as belonging to us is influenced by a number of factors, including social norms, cultural expectations, situational factors, personality characteristics, and the level of familiarity with others. For example, the amount of personal space needed when having a casual conversation with another person usually varies between eighteen (18) inches to four (4) feet. On the other hand, the personal distance needed when speaking to a crowd of people is around ten (10) to twelve (12) feet.

An officer conducting a field interview should ideally keep about four (4) to six (6) feet of distance between him- or herself and an interviewee. This distance allows the officer to view the interviewee's body language while also creating a safety zone for the officer to react to flight or attack.

Eye Gaze

The eyes play an important role in non-verbal communication and such things as looking, staring, and blinking can be important non-verbal behaviors. Looking at another person can indicate a range of emotions, including hostility, interest, and attraction. When people encounter people or things they like, for example, their rate of blinking increases and pupils dilate.

People also utilize eye gaze as a means to determine if someone is being honest. Normal, steady eye contact is often taken as a sign that a person is telling the truth and is trustworthy. Shifty eyes and an inability to maintain eye contact could be an indicator that someone is lying or being deceptive, but it could also mean they are nervous or scared.

Appearance

Our choice of clothing colors, clothing styles, hairstyles, and other factors affecting our appearance are considered a means of non-verbal communication. One person's appearance can alter another person's physiological reactions, judgments, and interpretations. Think of all the subtle assumptions you quickly make about someone based on his or her appearance. These first impressions can be important.

Researchers have found that appearance can play a role in how people are perceived and even how much they earn. One 1996 study found that attorneys who were rated as more attractive than their peers earned nearly 15% more than those rated as less attractive. Culture can have an important influence on how appearances are judged. While thinness tends to be valued in Western cultures, some African cultures relate full-figured bodies to better health, wealth, and social status.

Police uniforms are a non-verbal statement of police authority. The competence of an officer is in part judged by how they wear the uniform. An officer with a sloppy appearance may be perceived as less competent than an officer who maintains a sharp and professional appearance. You are required to adhere to MPD's uniform and appearance policy because the consistent, professional appearance of officers conveys a non-verbal message about the unity and competence of the entire department.

5.3.4 Appreciate the effect that an officer's non-verbal communication can have on the public

Our non-verbal signals relay a powerful message about what we are feeling and thinking. It is your responsibility as an officer to portray non-verbal signals that are consistent with a positive and professional image for the department and that reinforce legitimate law enforcement goals. Officers are human and they will have strong emotions while performing their duties. Such emotions though must be managed and, at times, concealed. It is important to avoid non-verbal signals driven by anger, frustration, and inattentiveness because they inhibit your ability to gain a community member's trust and effectively do your job.

5.3.5 Define key communication terms

Verbal communication is defined as the use of spoken words to convey a message to another person or group of people.

Everyone has expectations about how an interaction with the police should proceed and they tend to behave according to these expectations. The expectations are a result of personal experiences and the experiences of people close to them. When first meeting a police officer, someone may feel apprehension or nervousness simply at being in your presence. The sight of your uniform can add stress to whatever circumstance brings you two in contact. Because of this, it is critical that you choose your introductory words carefully. If possible, introduce yourself and say the reason you are there. A simple introduction and description of the reason for your presence in conjunction with positive non-verbal signals can reduce tension and help you build rapport.

Rapport is a sympathetic relationship or understanding between two people.

Building rapport with an individual will make it easier to accomplish whatever goals you may have. Building rapport is a process that begins when you first see each other (the non-verbal) and should be reinforced throughout your conversation (the verbal) in order to develop and maintain it. An effective way to strengthen rapport is to show empathy toward the individual with whom you are communicating.

5.3.6 Appreciate the importance of cognitive empathy as it pertains to law enforcement

There are two types of empathy. The first type is **affective empathy**, which refers to the sensations and feelings we develop in response to others' emotions. This is something that an individual feels and, as we know, our feelings are our own.

The second type is **cognitive empathy**, sometimes called "perspective taking." This refers to our ability to identify and understand other peoples' emotions. Cognitive empathy is something we do in law enforcement and is part of our professional responsibility when interacting with the public. In order to understand the true nature of any encounter, you need to make every effort to understand the motivation for and result of the situation. The motivation and the result can very well be emotional.

As a practice, officers need to look through a lens of cognitive empathy when dealing with the public. As you observed in the earlier video, an encounter could be as simple as a need for directions. Limited interactions like this can have a long-lasting effect on people and can shape their image of MPD and the city in either a positive or a negative manner based on their perception of you, as an officer.

Here are some phrases that help illustrate empathy:

- | | |
|--|---|
| "I can understand how frustrating it is..." | "I understand." |
| "I realize how complicated it is to..." | "I'd feel the same way if that happened to me." |
| "I cannot imagine how upsetting it is to..." | "I can see how you would feel that way." |
| "I know how confusing it must be when..." | "I can relate..." |
| "I'm so sorry to hear that..." | "I feel bad for you." |
| "I'm glad you called today so that we can take care of this right away." | "I agree completely." |

Empathetic phrases can be misinterpreted, however, if they are not accompanied with the appropriate non-verbal communication. If you use these phrases in conjunction with appropriate non-verbal communication, you will often find immediate positive results. The interesting thing about cognitive empathy is if you begin using it as a tool to do your job, you may develop feelings of affective empathy that can only reinforce the rapport you have with someone.

5.3.7 Describe how effective communication can de-escalate a situation

When dealing with unknown individuals under tense conditions there is potential for the situation to rise to violence. Each time we encounter a tense situation, our communication skills will be called upon to help us resolve or reduce the tension in the air. Even in situations where we may have to resort to defensive tactics or weapons to assist in resolving a situation, we are still required to *communicate*.

***Remember:** The first consideration of any interaction must be safety!* For that reason, we do not compromise safety to build rapport.

However, every situation is different. Sometimes you may need to restrain someone immediately. This can include occasions where restraint is necessary before that person can act violently or cause harm to you or someone else. Once that person has been restrained, you then need to attempt to build rapport with them and exercise empathetic communication to aid your investigation.

For example: A person suffering from a mental health disorder who is having delusions of violence may perceive a threat to him- or herself that is not there. The person may appear as though he or she is looking for a fight or trying to start a fight when in fact his or her actions are driven by an instinct of self-preservation because of a delusion. You need to assess the situation if safe to do so and try to communicate with the individual.

When there is sufficient time and when it is feasible, you should request a Crisis Intervention Officer (CIO) who is specially trained to deal with a person in crisis to respond to the scene. There might be situations where such a request is not feasible and immediate action must be taken due to the exigency of the circumstances presented. In these instances, render the scene safe. Then, a CIO should be requested to respond to the scene. The reality of the situation may be that you have to use some amount of force and apply handcuffs to prevent injury to yourself or someone else. More often than not after the application of handcuffs, some kind words and a soft tone can help bring the individual back to reality. This can make the rest of your interaction less of a struggle.

NOTE: We do not always need to forcefully restrain people during tense situations. Sometimes we can discreetly take steps to ensure our safety (e.g., via proxemics, placing obstacles between you and the suspect to make an attack more difficult, or cover officer positioning) while using communication to de-escalate a situation to the point of a peaceful and voluntary resolution.

De-escalation

De-escalation involves taking action or communicating verbally or non-verbally during a potential force encounter in an attempt to stabilize the situation and reduce the immediacy of the threat so that more time, options, and resources can be called upon to resolve the situation without the use of force or with a reduction in necessary force. Techniques may include verbal persuasion, warnings, slowing down the pace of an incident, and tactical repositioning. On the other hand, if we use poor communication skills, we can unintentionally escalate a situation to a point where we must use force that would have otherwise been unnecessary.

5.3.8 Understand what a community is

Hundreds of thousands of people live, work, visit, and go to school in the District. Part of being an effective police officer is having knowledge of the diverse communities that make DC. unique, and possessing the ability to positively engage with the people who comprise these different neighborhoods. Communities are the heart of any city and are often based upon shared faith, culture, lifestyle, education, and geography. Communities can also be influenced by such other factors as the availability of transportation, the Metro, parking, driving services, biking/walking access, etc. Communities are also shaped by the unfortunate crime that takes place there. Crime is different in each community and who is committing crimes in each community is likewise different. It is important for members to familiar themselves with the crime statistics within their district in order to understand the “5 W’s” (who, what, where, when, and why) as it pertains to crime. This particular knowledge is not only useful in identifying and addressing

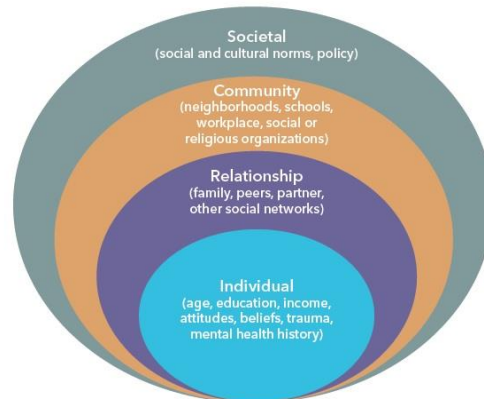
specific crime trends, but it is also beneficial when communicating with community members so that all parties involved are aware of what may be occurring in a particular community.

Stakeholders in Community

A stakeholder is a person who has an interest or concern in something which, in this case, is the community. The most important stakeholders are community members who live and work in DC. Other stakeholders include those who protect, serve, or represent the District in one manner or another. All of these stakeholders cannot do one thing without affecting the other; your actions as a police officer on or off duty “affect the matrix” more than ever.

Elected officials, community leaders, neighborhood leaders, public interest groups, diverse cultural groups, faith groups, and others, all have a vested interest in open and clear communication regarding what is occurring throughout the District. How certain groups find out about certain events, good or bad, can highlight the level, accuracy, and clarity of communication that takes place both within and between differing groups.

This graphic depicts the various roles stakeholders play within a community:



5.3.9 Compare and contrast good and bad communication

This section is designed to have you explore answers to the following questions:

- What do good and bad communication look like?
- What do good and bad communication sound like?
- Why are you a good or bad communicator? (Remember that the act of communicating is an ever-evolving skillset that needs to be practiced and can be improved over time.)
- How can you engage a community member in a non-intimidating manner?

Communication Strategies

There are several factors to being able to communicate effectively:

- Tone
- Volume
- Creditability
- Style of Communication

- Timing

5.3.10 Understand why building relationships is important to community engagement

Building relationships with and within your community is a fundamental building block to creating a safe, fun, and strong community. When community members see officers who care and want to be involved with the community, it creates and builds the stepping-stones needed for an effective relationship. Such relationships are two-way streets that are achieved through the collaborative communication and work of both officers and the members of each community they serve.

Ways to open lines of police-community communications involve, but are not limited to, the following:

- Actively engage community members in events, playing games, basketball, soccer, chess, ice cream socials, block parties, shoe drives, school supply drives, clothing drives, ride and walk-alongs, etc.
- Increase foot beats. Get out of the car and off the phone!
- Show that you care by demonstrating empathy and effective communication.
- You are more than just a badge and a gun. Get to know your community and let them get to know you.
- Demonstrate why we do what we do, why you want to be there, and your passion for protecting and serving.
- Volunteering
- Fundraising

How do you engage a community member in a non-intimidating manner? People might be conditioned to be a little nervous or scared when the lights flash, sirens wail, or they see an officer approach. These reactions could be based upon a variety of things such as past individual experiences with law enforcement, societal and cultural norms, expectations, and representations of police officers in the movies, on television, or on the news. While interacting with your community members, take the time to make it a positive experience and change assumptions about police. Make every interaction a positive one. Your tactfulness and situational awareness are key to building and establishing rapport with community members.

As an officer, you will need to be able to effectively communicate with citizens, regardless of their status, age, and gender. Recognizing the generational differences and being able to adapt your communication skills will provide comfort and ease as you converse with community members.

As an officer you need to speak to people; do not be scared to do so. People like to talk and the more you create a space and environment for such conversations, the more community members will be willing to speak and listen to you. Again, relationships go both ways and as you expect the community to speak and listen to you, community members expect you to listen and speak to them.

5.3.11 Identify the positive and negative aspects of technology as it relates to policing

Technology is a wonderful tool to have and use, but it can also be detrimental in certain policing situations. Present day society is focused on what happens at that very moment in time. Cellphones, computers, tablets, BWC, cameras, etc., all capture moments in time. This can be very beneficial in recreating scenes and helping to solving crimes. But recorded images may only tell a portion of the story and cause more chaos than necessary.

Be mindful of your cellphone use and how it affects the way you communicate with community members and perform your job.

5.3.12 Identify some of the various neighborhoods that are located within Washington, DC

As learned in previous lessons, DC is a very diverse city and has a grid lay out made up of numbered, lettered, and state named streets. The city's seven police patrol districts have distinct neighborhoods within them. You as a patrol officer will be responsible for learning about, and interacting with, each of these neighborhoods.

The following link is a great place to start learning about the various neighborhoods of DC: <https://washington.org/dc-neighborhoods>.

You should also do your own research into the District. There are other websites, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, etc., that all show all things DC.

You also need to take time to learn the geography of DC and how to get around. In an emergency you need to be able to get from point A to point B without getting lost or having to use google maps. The lessons and activities from Block 1 should have helped you start to learn the layout of the city, but you will need to continue learning the city's geography to truly feel comfortable with your surroundings and where you are in the city.

Summary

In this lesson we have discussed types of communication, the elements of non-verbal communication, the effect that an officer's non-verbal communication can have on the public, the importance of cognitive empathy, and how effective communication can de-escalate a tense situation. The use of effective communication and empathetic language in law enforcement is in some ways an art form and it can be developed through practice. You will be expected to practice the skills you have learned here throughout your time at the academy. Developing communications skills will make you a more effective police officer on the street. Your professionalism, demeanor, attitude, and approach all dictate how well you will communicate with the community members you have chosen to protect and serve. There will be good times and bad times when interacting with the community, but every interaction should leave a community member with a feeling of respect. Even if you are arresting them or giving them a citation, community members still deserve respect and that can only come with effective communication.