EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

If employees are tickled to see the boss, I know that he or she is a great hands-on manager.[1]

J. W. Marriott, Jr.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Define communication and explain its importance as a management tool.
- Contrast formal and informal methods of communication.
- Discuss the common forms of upward and downward communication used by supervisors and managers in the hospitality industry.
- Outline circumstances that call for verbal, written, and electronic communication methods.
- List common barriers to effective communication and describe techniques for overcoming such barriers.
- Explain the difference between active and passive listening.
- Identify guidelines for providing positive and negative employee feedback.

HRM IN ACTION Excellent interpersonal or human relations skills are absolutely required if you hope to eventually become a successful supervisor, manager, or owner of a profitable hospitality enterprise. This is especially true for both lower-level managers and owners who have daily contact with both employees and valued guests and customers. Because the communication process contributes significantly to our overall interpersonal skills, our ability to communicate effectively will undoubtedly play a huge role in the success or failure of the operation.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The **communication process** is simply the sending and receiving of information, which is a powerful thing. Information enables managers and supervisors to make sound business decisions. Without it, important decisions about the organization, its environment, its products and services, and its employees and customers are made in a vacuum; nothing could be more dangerous for a hospitality business. Information is also an important key to employee satisfaction. For employees, a lack of sufficient information will often lead to high-stress levels and low morale among workers, two significant causes of turnover in the hospitality industry.

If information is the engine that drives the business, then the **communication systems** that management puts into place are what fuel the engine. Communication systems may be written or verbal and can be a combination of both formal and informal methods for circulating information throughout the organization.

AN EXAMPLE FROM MARRIOTT

When J. W. Marriott Jr. tours one of his hotels, he likes to stroll the entire property with the general manager at his side. Marriott is not only interested in the hotel's "numbers," but he also pays attention to the way the general manager interacts with the hotel's staff. Speaking of one such stroll, Marriott said that he and the hotel's general manager were "greeted by smiles, teasing, and hellos from just about every Marriott associate we passed. What's the big deal? Why was I so pleased? At Marriott, the reaction of staff to the GM is the ultimate litmus test of how well a hotel is run."[2]

This hands-on, **management-by-walking-around (MBWA)** approach has been an important part of Marriott's corporate culture for more than 75 years. It also illustrates an effective **informal communication method.** Other exam-

TALES FROM THE FIELD

I took a job in the kitchen of a really nice restaurant in Chicago when I graduated from culinary school. The restaurant was privately owned, and every evening—just before service—the owner would come in and give everyone a pep talk. He was an excellent communicator, and everyone really liked him a lot. You just knew that he cared about his employees, his business, and his customers. One afternoon I had just gotten to work, and when I walked into the kitchen, I saw one of the sous chefs screaming at the dishwasher. He was really talking down to him, and I was shocked because that was just not the way things were done in this restaurant. Just then the owner walked into the kitchen and saw what was going on. He walked up to the dishwasher and he said, "Hand me your apron." The dishwasher lowered his eyes and did as he was told, and then the owner took his wallet out of his pocket and peeled off two $100 bills. He handed them to the dish-washer and said, "Take the evening off and have a great time on me; I'll see you back here tomorrow night." He then handed the apron to the sous chef and said, "Put this on; you're washing dishes tonight.

Ashley, 24, Merrillville, Indiana

ples of informal communication may include an open-door policy and even the **employee grapevine. Formal communication methods** may consist of such things as memos, reports, employee suggestion boxes, and employee newsletters or bulletin boards.

WHICH COMMUNICATION METHOD IS BEST?

The extent to which management needs to convey or receive information, as well as the type of information that needs conveying, will best determine the optimal form of communication. Clearly, matters affecting policy, procedures, and other issues of importance will require more formal methods of delivery. The intended audience, or those who will receive the information, will also determine whether a more formal or informal approach is necessary. Formal communication often addresses task-related issues and tends to span the organization's chain of command. Examples include the following:

- A supervisor gives directions to an employee about how to greet a guest.
- An employee offers advice to a work team in her department.

- An employee suggests a way to improve productivity to his supervisor.
- A supervisor interacts with other supervisors at a weekly staff meeting.
- An employee responds in writing to a request made by his supervisor.

Informal communication may or may not follow the chain of command; it may move in any direction, and it is as likely to satisfy social needs as it is to facilitate the functions of business. Informal communication methods such as MBWA, which was illustrated in the Marriott example, encourage effective two-way communication among staff as well as between managers and subordinates. The traditional **open-door policy,** in which employees are free to walk into any manager's office with their problems, is another way to foster informal communication. Most workers are reluctant to take a problem to their boss, or even to their boss's boss, so the best open-door policy is the one in which the manager gets up from her desk and walks out of her office to talk to employees in their space.

THE EMPLOYEE GRAPEVINE

Perhaps the least understood method of informal communication is the employee grapevine and the rumors and gossip it provides. When two employees chat in the break room about their trouble with a supervisor, this is grapevine communication. Some managers see this as a positive source of informal communication, and they have an interest in the grapevine because it provides useful, off-the-record feedback from employees—if managers are prepared to listen, understand, and interpret the information. The types of information that management finds useful with regard to the employee grapevine are illustrated in Figure 13.1.

- Information about problems or anxieties that employees may have
- Incorrect feedback that is evidence of breakdowns in communication systems
- Insights into goals and motivations of employees
- Identification of job problems that have high-emotional content
- Information about the quality of supervision
- Information about areas of job dissatisfaction
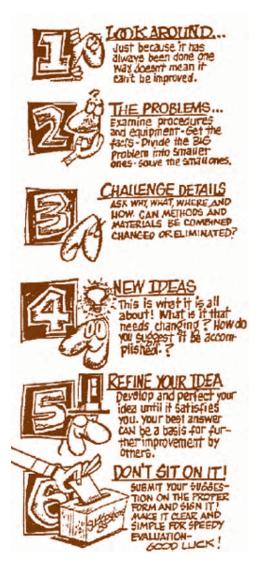- Information about acceptance of new policies and procedures

Figure 13.1   Types of feedback "heard through the grapevine" that should be of interest to managers.

Managers who keep their employees in the dark about company concerns have the potential to breed anxiety and fuel gossip and rumors, a generally less-positive form of grapevine communication. A recent study conducted by ISR, a global employee research and consulting firm headquartered in Chicago, found that the majority of employees view the employee grapevine as more informative than what they hear from their boss when it comes to work issues, and 63 percent of workers said that rumors are usually how they first hear about important business matters.[3] Good leaders are good communicators, and this research shows that some managers have a lot to learn when it comes to communicating with their employees. One thing is certain: The employee grapevine will never go away, so wise managers will learn to tap into the grapevine's value as a way of identifying key issues of importance to employees.

DOWNWARD AND UPWARD COMMUNICATION

The most effective hospitality managers and supervisors make use of extensive communication systems to keep people informed. Although the goal is to facilitate an open, two-way flow of information, most messages are of the top-down variety. **Downward communication** is information that begins at some point in the organizational structure and cascades down the chain of command to inform or influence others. Downward communication is necessary to execute decisions and to give employees information about the organization. Successful hospitality operations should use a variety of downward communication methods because the diversity of multiple-communication channels is more likely to overcome barriers and reach the intended receivers.[4] Examples of downward communication include company and department newsletters and bulletin boards, e-mail and recorded messages, reports, booklets, and meetings held to inform employees about company issues.

Upward communication originates within the organization's lower levels and filters to its higher levels. This sort of communication is initiated by employees who seek to inform or influence those who are higher up in the organization's hierarchy. In many hospitality businesses, there is probably no area of communication that is more in need of improvement than upward communication. When supervisors have a good relationship with their line employees, and when two-way communication between these groups flows freely, upward communication is very powerful in that it allows employees to participate in the day-to-day decision making that goes on in the organization. Some hospitality businesses encourage this form of communication by using **employee suggestion boxes.** Workers are encouraged to write down their ideas or concerns and drop them in a special box, sometimes anonymously, where

Figure 13.2

Indiana State Government Employees' suggestion box tips.

upper management will later retrieve them and, hopefully, act on them. In some instances, organizations will reward an employee who has come up with a cost-saving idea or with an idea to increase business and revenue. The state of Indiana encourages state government employees to utilize its employee suggestion program. Figure 13.2 illustrates Indiana's simple, yet user-friendly, six-step approach, which encourages government workers to participate in the program.

When information does not flow freely and upward communication is blocked, it may result in chaos and may even create dangerous conditions. Consider the following "Tales from the Field":

TALES FROM THE FIELD

I worked as a part-time night auditor in a good-sized hotel in my hometown during my summer breaks. Management never listened to anything employees had to say, but I didn't mind so much since I knew the job was only temporary. Usually during my work shift, the only employees on the property would be a part-time security guard and me. Part of my normal routine would be to go to the hotel restaurant and 'Z' out their cash register and bring the journal tapes back to the front desk. I usually cut through the kitchen when I did this. One morning at about 2 A.M., I headed into the kitchen, and I immediately smelled smoke. I flipped on the lights, but I couldn't see anything, but I could sure smell it. I followed my nose, which took me behind the line where I began to open warming drawers, and as soon as I opened this one drawer, flames shot out higher than my head. Someone had left greasy rags in there but hadn't turned off the drawer, so apparently when the air hit the rags, boom! Anyway, the flames had then gotten so bad that the grill and the hood started to flame up. I had no choice but to reach over and pull the ring that set off the emergency fire suppression system. Well, that put out the fire, but what a mess. It also set off the hotel's fire alarm, so the fire department showed up, and guests were now calling the front desk pretty concerned. The fire department got things under control very quickly, the guests went back to bed, and I immediately phoned the food and beverage director to let her know what had happened as well as the hotel's GM. The F&B director was great; she immediately called staff in to start cleaning up the mess of powder that was sprayed all over by the fire system so that the restaurant could open for breakfast, but when the GM came in, he was irate. He fired me the next day, saying that I overreacted and that I should have used a handheld fire extinguisher to put out the fire. I couldn't believe it! I later heard from some coworkers that corporate came in and fired the GM after a bunch of employees called the home office to complain about how this manager reacted. I was later offered my job back, but I declined. I'd pretty much had enough by then.

Lee, 28, Cincinnati, Ohio

VERBAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Managers and supervisors must constantly rely on their verbal communication skills. Meeting with an employee, training a new hire, instructing staff members, as well as soothing the ruffled feathers of a disgruntled guest are all superb examples of instances in which excellent communication skills are

Photo 13.1   The benefits of verbal communication include the ease and speed with which large amounts of information can be conveyed.

essential in order for managers and supervisors to work effectively with their employees, as well as their guests.

There are many benefits to delivering information to others orally. Certainly, the ease and speed with which large amounts of information can be conveyed is one benefit. One's facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice used will also add depth to the information being delivered. Many would argue that due to the evolution of e-mail and other electronic means of communication, verbal communication provides a more personal interaction and fosters feelings of trust and goodwill.

If the message you need to send is somewhat complex and official, or is intended for a more formal audience, then written communication is generally the method that should be used. Forms of written communication include memos, reports, presentations, and so forth. Generally, the lengthier and more involved the message, the greater the need for presenting the information in written form. This method also provides an official record or other such documentation, which may be important in the future for substantiating facts and information. Providing communication in writing also helps to eliminate confusion and ambiguity over the message that is being sent.

ethical dilemma

Willie worked as a front-office manager for a large, national hotel chain. His hotel shared a region with 11 other properties, and all of the front-office managers knew each other well, because they often attended regional meetings and training seminars together. None cared very much for Stan, the regional director; in fact, most of them thought he was an arrogant jerk, and they rarely skipped an opportunity to tell a joke about him or share some gossip about Stan's most recent tirades.

Business was slow one evening at Willie's hotel, so he wrote a rather derogatory poem about Stan and he set it to the music of a popular song. He was proud of his creativity, so he e-mailed his song to his good friend Mark, who worked as the front-office manager at a property across town. Mark was so impressed with Willie's talent that he forwarded the song to Julie, who worked 500 miles away. Julie loved it and forwarded it on to two or three other front-office managers in the region, and before long, everyone had received an e-mailed copy of Willie's clever song—even the regional director, Stan, who was not one bit impressed. Stan told Willie's general manager to fire Willie the next day, and even though the general manager thought the song was pretty clever, she followed orders and terminated Willie for improper use of the hotel computer system. Did Willie violate any of the *10 Ethical Principles for Hospitality Managers,* and, if so, which ones? Was Stan being ethical when he directed the GM to terminate Willie? Why or why not? Did any of the other front-office managers in the region violate any of the 10 principles? Explain.

THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

E-mail, voice mail, cell phones, pagers, the Internet, and even corporate intranets have forever changed the way in which individuals communicate with one another. Hospitality businesses, large and small, increasingly rely upon these electronic means of sending and receiving information. Today's technology enables key staff members to be in constant contact with management—and vice versa—no matter where in the world each person is located. Of all of these electronic methods of communication now available, e-mail is probably the most popular Internet application because it extends and enhances our ability to communicate with others regardless of physical geography. E-mail encourages informal communication. The ease of quickly typing a reply to a message and zapping it off within minutes of receiving the initial message is a powerful and efficient way to communicate. However, such ease and informality may create problems for those using e-mail, so it is necessary to use judgment, restraint, and thoughtfulness when communicating by e-mail. Figures 13.3 and 13.4 illustrate some common e-mail dos and don'ts.

PROPER E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

- Do check and review your organization's e-mail policy. Many companies have rules about the types of messages that can be sent.
- Do try to think about the message content before you send it out.
- Do make sure that the content is relevant to the recipients. Nobody likes to receive junk mail.
- Do be polite. Terse messages can be misinterpreted.
- Do try to use humor and irony sparingly. You can use smiles such as :) or :(to indicate facial expressions, but make sure that the recipient understands what they mean.
- Do ensure that you have a relevant "Subject" line.
- Do be patient, especially with inexperienced e-mail users. Give people the benefit of the doubt—just because you are familiar with e-mail etiquette, it doesn't mean that they are.
- Do include a brief signature on your e-mail messages to help the recipient identify you, especially if you are dealing with someone you do not know very well.
- Do be careful when replying to mailing list messages or messages sent to many recipients. Are you sure you want to reply to the whole list?
- Do remember to delete anything that isn't needed or that is trivial.

Figure 13.3   Examples of proper e-mail etiquette at the workplace.

IMPROPER E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

- Don't reply to an e-mail message when angry; you may regret it later.
- Don't keep mail on your server longer than necessary, especially large attachments.
- Don't type in capitals, as this is considered to be shouting. This is one of the rudest things you can do.
- Don't overuse punctuation such as exclamation marks! In particular, avoid more than one exclamation mark (!!), especially if your e-mail is quite formal. Also, overuse of ellipses (e.g., " ….") can make a message difficult to read.
- Don't send large attachments without checking with the recipient first.
- Don't send excessive multiple postings to people who have no interest. This is known as "spamming" and is considered to be ignorant, and may lead to serious trouble with your Internet service provider (ISP) or IT department.
- Don't send chain letters or "make money fast" messages. These are annoying to most recipients.
- Don't criticize people's spelling; it is considered petty. Many people have no way of running a spell-check on their messages and will make typos.
- Don't "flame" people by sending them abusive e-mail messages.
- Don't make personal remarks about third parties. E-mail messages can come back to haunt you.

Figure 13.4   Examples of improper e-mail etiquette at the workplace.

In business, the formality of e-mail messages tends to vary, between the semiformal approach, previously the domain of the interoffice memo, and the chatty exchanges that you might have with someone over the telephone or while sitting in the break room. The approach you take when e-mailing will depend upon your intended audience. And remember that because e-mail messages are surprisingly permanent and are technically online written messages, a good rule of thumb is to think before you zap the "Send" button.

CORPORATE WEB-SURFING POLICIES

A large percentage of companies are monitoring Internet use by workers, hospitality operations included. While some organizations still allow some personal use of the Web, many companies will ask employees to limit the amount of time they spend at online shopping sites, and some companies will block employee access to some Web locations altogether. Companies are taking advantage of new Web-filtering software programs that allow management to retain and review employees' e-mail messages, and most companies have some kind of policy regarding personal e-mail use. Other types of monitoring software allow organizations to monitor and track e-mail content, keystrokes, and the time an employee spends at the keyboard. Plenty of workers have been fired for misusing the Internet. A good rule of thumb for hospitality managers and employees is to apply good judgment when accessing the Internet and to keep focused on the task at hand.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The messages that we send are not always the messages that are received. It is easy for our communications to be rendered ineffective if the sender and/or the receiver interpret the message in a way that distorts or obscures the intended meaning. For example, if your new friend Cameron phones you and says, "Hey, I thought I'd come over and knock you up!" this message may be deemed as either extremely offensive or, at the very least, quite confusing. Once you realize that Cameron is from New Zealand and in the vernacular of that country, to "knock someone up" means to go knock on their door and pay them a visit—the message is no longer unclear.

Obstacles, or barriers, to effective communication can take many forms. Examples include cultural differences, which can affect attitudes, opinions, and values; differences in background, which include education, past experiences, and intelligence; our prejudices and perceptions; our assumptions and expectations; and our emotions.

Photo 13.2   Providing managers and supervisors with basic Spanish language skills can eliminate communication barriers in some instances and may even make the hospitality operation's job openings more appealing to Hispanic job applicants.

Cultural Differences   When individuals have different cultural backgrounds, effective communication can be challenging because differences in backgrounds will affect our attitudes, opinions, and values. Two individuals may even share the same cultural backgrounds but still differ in the way they think about things and look at certain issues. The old adage that one can talk about anything but religion and politics has a ring of truth to it, as people have strong feelings about these issues. Even some family members cannot agree on these matters. It is best for hospitality managers and supervisors to err on the side of caution here, especially with respect to such activities as telling off-color jokes, ethnic-based jokes, and so forth. Not only does this behavior put you at risk of losing the respect of your coworkers and subordinates, but it could get you into legal trouble as well.

Differences in Background   People sometimes struggle with the communication process when they do not share similar backgrounds. Someone's background might include the level of education attained, the past experiences encountered, and the person's overall level of intelligence. These inherent differences do not suggest that the individual with more education is *better* than the individual with less, or that the person who has had a wider variety of unique experiences is better than the person who has had less.

Obviously, it is important to be aware of such differences and adjust your approach to the communication process appropriately. Kitchen jargon can be dif-

The Lingo	And the Translation:
1. Adam's ale, hold the hail	**1.** Water, no ice
2. Blowout patches	**2.** Pancakes
3. C. J. White	**3.** Cream cheese and jelly sandwich on white bread
4. Drag one through Georgia	**4.** Coca-Cola with chocolate syrup
5. Flop two	**5.** Two fried eggs, over
6. Sinkers and suds	**6.** Doughnuts and coffee
7. Jack Tommy	**7.** Cheese and tomato sandwich
8. Put out the lights and cry	**8.** Liver and onions
9. Sweep the kitchen	**9.** Hash
10. Burn one, take it through the garden and pin a rose on it	**10.** Hamburger with lettuce, tomato, and onion
11. Paint a bow-wow red	**11.** Hot dog with ketchup
12. Burn the British and draw one in the dark	**12.** English muffin, toasted, with black coffee
13. Adam and Eve on a raft and wreck 'em	**13.** Eggs on toast, scrambled
14. A spot with a twist	**14.** Tea with lemon
15. Whisky down	**15.** Rye toast

Figure 13.5   Diner slang popularized in the 1930s and 1940s.

ficult for newcomers to grasp, and, often, modern slang falls on deaf ears if the receiver of the message is significantly older than the sender. The reverse is true when older slang is directed at a younger audience. Consider the plight of the 15 year old who worked the counter at his parent's diner after school: A customer walked in, plopped down on a lunch counter stool, and said, "Gimme some Joe." "My name's Luke," said the kid, somewhat perplexed. "No," the guy said, "Joe, you know, coffee." Diner slang is colorful jargon used by waitresses and countermen in the 1930s and 1940s. More examples can be found in Figure 13.5.

Prejudices and Perceptions   Aside from differences in age, education, and culture, prejudices and perceptions can also distort communication. In the hospitality industry, workers are often drawn from diverse backgrounds, which will, of course, influence the language they use and the meanings that they give to words. We often think of prejudice as biases certain individuals have against people of a specific race,

gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. Prejudice may also include biases against certain religions, against people who are overweight, against people whose political opinions differ from our own, and even against people who grew up in different parts of the United States. It is important not to form wide-sweeping opinions about members of a certain group. Words should be chosen carefully so as not to offend; otherwise, the message you are sending will simply stir up anger and cause your message to be rejected.

An individual's perceptions can be a barrier to effective communications. People tend to see and sense things differently. Using words that have no real, concrete meaning will often lead to confusion and chaos. Here are some examples that could lead to problems in the kitchen:

- "Just season it to taste, please."
- "I only need the coffee warm, not too hot."
- "Could you dice some carrots; I need a lot."
- "The music playing in the dining room should be soft, not loud."

When giving direction and instructions to your staff, it is best to use language that is measurable, concrete, and not open to interpretation.

Assumptions and Expectations

When you assume listeners know what you are talking about, you are simply asking for trouble. If, in fact, the listener is oblivious, the entire message may be lost. It is best to know for certain that the listener is on the same page as you so that you avoid anger and confusion when your message is not properly acted upon. This is especially true in operations that may have employees who do not speak English as a first language. People who come from certain cultural backgrounds may be reluctant to tell you that they do not understand something. Misguided assumptions may also lead to jumping to inaccurate conclusions, which prevents effective communication. Where expectations are concerned, we often get exactly what we expect to get. In other words, if you expect very little from your employees because you think that they are basically lazy and stupid, then that is exactly what you are likely to get. We communicate our expectations all the time, whether we realize it or not. Communicating high expectations will often result in high achievement on the part of your employees.

Emotions

Emotions are a powerful force, but they have no real place in effective communication at work. In fact, emotions may be one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome, particularly the emotion of anger. Things said in anger tend to bury the message entirely, leaving the listener only with feelings of anger, fear, or anxiety. A good rule of thumb is to regain your composure before speaking.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Some of the barriers and obstacles may never be completely overcome. People are different, and that is unlikely to change anytime soon. The hospitality industry draws employees from diverse backgrounds that, in some cases, only tend to complicate the communication process further. Being aware of these obstacles is the first step to overcoming them. There are some other actions that effective managers and supervisors can take to overcome the barriers to effective communication. These actions include the following:

Think about what you are going to say. If the message you intend to deliver is not entirely clear to you, then it certainly will not be clearly conveyed or received by the listener. If your message is to be delivered in writing, jot down some notes and reread what you have written, ensuring clarity of message.

Keep your emotions under control. No one will be rational 100 percent of the time, but it is a good practice to maintain rationality *most* of the time. Remember that extreme emotions will cloud your message and misconstrue meaning. When in doubt, chill out first.

Be a good listener. Most people are not very good listeners. We hear things, but that is not necessarily the same as listening. Active listening is the key to being a good listener, and we will examine active and passive listening techniques in the next section of this chapter.

Actions speak louder than words. Be sure that your actions and your body language match your message. Nonverbal cues carry a lot of weight, so the effective manager must be tuned in to body language, both his own and that of the listener.

Provide and ask for feedback. It is important to provide employees with feedback, whether it is positive or negative. It is also important to ask for feedback to ensure that messages sent have been properly received. We will look at feedback techniques in the final section of this chapter.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE LISTENING

Much of the information presented in this chapter thus far has focused on communication methods that involve sending or delivering information. While these skills are certainly necessary in order to achieve effective communication, they only paint half of the picture. The other half of the picture is, of course, your ability to listen effectively. **Passive listening** is simply hearing; in other words, you are not really processing the entire message. You may get bits and pieces, but more likely than not, you will not process the information that was sent. **Active listening,** on the other hand, requires effort and concentration

because you want to fully understand what the speaker is saying. There are generally four requirements for active listening:

1. *Listen with intensity.* Because it is easy for the mind to wander, active listening requires concentration and focus. Instead of thinking about what you will make for dinner or what you will wear to next week's party, you are an active listener if your thought process involves summarizing and integrating what is being said.

2. *Listen with empathy.* Your ability to put yourself in the speaker's shoes means that you must put your own thoughts and assumptions on hold and try to understand what the speaker wants to communicate, rather than what you want to understand.

3. *Listen with acceptance.* This means that you are objective about the message being sent and that you do not prejudge the speaker or the content of the information being delivered. Distractions occur when you disagree and begin to compose some objection or retort in your mind. It is more effective to concentrate on the entire message as it is delivered and to withhold objections until the speaker is finished.

4. *Take responsibility for the message.* In other words, now may be the time to ask for clarification, to disagree with a point made, to agree, or simply to respond in some meaningful manner. Active listeners take responsibility to ensure that they have received the speaker's full, intended meaning.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Some inexperienced hospitality managers and supervisors believe that *managing* means strolling out of the office once or twice a day and trying to catch an employee doing something wrong. That way, the manager can *manage* things, by telling the employee what he has done wrong. This action is usually followed by the manager making a hasty retreat back to the office, leaving the employee in the dust with a bewildered look on his face. Effective managers realize that there will be times when they will need to correct employee behavior so that standards of performance are being met, but these managers also spend a great deal of time trying to catch employees doing things right. When this occurs, and it *will* occur often if the manager is truly doing his job, it presents an opportunity to provide some **positive feedback** and, thus, reinforce positive behavior. Believe it or not, **negative feedback** can also change behavior when properly directed.

The Role of Positive Feedback

Telling your employees that they are doing a good job and then pointing out specific examples is providing positive feedback. When the executive housekeeper says to the room attendant, "Great job! This room is perfect. I can see that you

take a lot of pride in your work," the manager has left the room attendant with a feeling of pride for a job well done, and the manager has also reinforced the importance of properly cleaning the hotel's guest rooms. Such feedback only takes a moment to deliver, but its effects can last a very long time.

Positive feedback is easy to deliver, so it's unclear why many managers and supervisors fail miserably in this area. Employees in some hospitality operations get so little feedback from management that they begin to wonder whether the work that they do even matters. These are the employees who quickly get frustrated and leave the company for greener pastures—not in the sense that they leave for more money, but that they prefer to work for an organization where what they do is important to the overall success of the operation, that what they do matters. Delivering positive feedback usually feels good, both to the deliverer and to the receiver. Positive feedback is almost always well received because it reinforces what people want to hear or what they already believe to be true about themselves.

The Role of Negative Feedback

Strolling out of the office and barking at the employee who has done something wrong is not negative feedback. It certainly is *negative,* but the missing element would be the *feedback.* Managers often avoid negative feedback because they know that it will be met with resistance by their employees. Most people only want to hear the good things, not the bad. Negative feedback should not be avoided, however, but simply reworked in such a way that it becomes an effective management tool. The ultimate goal of negative feedback is to change incorrect behavior or performance, so it is best used when you are dealing with absolutes such as hard numbers, data, and other specifics. Telling an employee that she has a bad attitude is really not telling that employee anything at all. What does *bad* mean exactly? Did she come to work somewhat grouchy and a few minutes late, or did she get into a screaming match with a customer?

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING FEEDBACK THAT WORKS

The goal of feedback is either to enforce behavior (positive feedback) or change behavior (negative feedback). In order for feedback to be effective, you should remember the following points:

- *Be specific.* This is most important when the feedback is meant to correct behavior or actions that do not meet performance standards. Even when you are providing positive feedback, specifics are important so that the employee knows exactly which behavior to repeat.

- *It's not personal.* Don't attack the person; attack the behavior. Rather than saying, "You're doing a bad job," choose wording that focuses on the behav-

ior, *not* on the employee's personality. Focusing on the person rather than the behavior will rarely be met with anything but a negative reaction and is hardly productive.

- *Be in the moment.* Feedback that is either negative or positive must be delivered in a timely manner. It does no good to delay negative feedback because much information can be lost over time. It's best to correct inappropriate behavior at the moment it occurs. This principle also applies to positive feedback.

- *Keep the goal in mind.* Negative feedback should only be offered when doing so can change behavior. What is your goal in delivering negative feedback? Do you just need to dump on someone, or can you pinpoint specific behavior that needs improving and offer reasons for why it should be improved.

One final thing to keep in mind when offering negative feedback is that the feedback should be directed at something over which the employee has control. Negative feedback also presents management with a good opportunity to offer suggestions on how the employee can change behavior for the better.

SUMMARY

- Effective managers and supervisors need excellent interpersonal or human relations skills in order to communicate with employees and provide the kind of work environment where talented employees can self-motivate.
- The communication process—sending and receiving information—contributes significantly to one's human relations skills.
- When employees lack sufficient information, the result can be stress and low morale, which leads to high employee turnover rates.
- Communications systems drive the communication process; these systems may be written, verbal, formal, and informal.
- The extent to which management needs to convey or receive information, as well as the type of information that needs to be conveyed, will determine whether formal or informal methods should be used.
- Formal communication may be written or verbal, and it usually follows the chain of command. Informal communication may also be written or verbal, but it may not follow the chain of command; it may move in any direction.
- The employee grapevine is an example of informal communication, but managers should have an interest in the grapevine because it can provide useful, off-the-record feedback from employees.
- Downward communication begins at some point higher in the chain of command and flows downward, whereas upward communication passes from the organization's lower-level employees to its higher-level employees and management.

- Verbal communication is effective because of the speed with which large amounts of information can be conveyed. Written communication is effective when the message is complex and/or an official record needs to be created.
- The use of e-mail is probably the most popular Internet communication method, and special care should be taken to ensure that users within a particular organization follow e-mail etiquette.
- Obstacles to effective communication include cultural differences, differences in background, prejudices and perceptions, assumptions and expectations, and emotions.
- Managers can overcome common barriers to effective communication by thinking about what they are going to say or write, keeping their emotions under control, being good listeners, matching their actions with their words, and providing feedback to employees and asking for feedback from them as well.
- Passive listening is simply hearing, not processing, the information being sent. Active listening requires concentration and listening with intensity, listening with empathy, listening with acceptance, and taking responsibility for the message.
- The purpose of positive feedback is to boost morale as well as to reinforce positive actions or behavior. The purpose of negative feedback is to change behavior.
- When providing either positive or negative feedback, managers should be specific and should focus on the behavior and not on the employee personally. They should also be sure that the feedback is timely, and they should keep the end goal in mind.

PRACTICE QUIZ

1. Management-by-walking-around (MBWA) is a formal, written communication system that has been in place at the Marriott Hotel Corporation for more than 75 years.

   A. True   B. False

2. Formal communication systems are always preferred to informal communication systems because otherwise, employees will not pay attention to the information being sent.

   A. True   B. False

3. In organizations with open door policies, employees are sometimes reluctant to take a problem to their boss or to their boss's boss.

   A. True   B. False

4. Keeping employees in the dark about company concerns will often fuel gossip and rumors, but that is okay because most managers find this information useful.

   A. True   B. False

5. Downward communication is normally initiated by employees who are lower in the organization's hierarchy.

   A. True   B. False

6. Which of the following is *not* a key benefit of verbal communication?

   A. It works well when the message is complex.

   B. It works well because it can deliver large amounts of information with speed and ease.

   C. It works well because of the added benefit of tone of voice.

   D. It works well because of the added benefit of body language.

7. Differences in background is a common obstacle to effective communication because of all of the following except:

   A. Individuals may not share the same education levels.

   B. Individuals may not share the same emotions.

   C. Individuals may not share the same past experiences.

   D. Individuals may not share the same level of intelligence.

8. Active listening techniques involve all the following except:

   A. Empathy

   B. Acceptance

   C. Intensity

   D. Emotion

9. Positive feedback seeks to accomplish which of the following?

   A. Ignore employee morale

   B. Reinforce negative stereotypes

   C. Reinforce positive behavior or actions

   D. All of the above

10. Which of the following is *not* a guideline for providing effective feedback?

   A. Always wait a few days before delivering negative feedback so as to keep your emotions in check.

   B. Focus on specific behavior whether your feedback is positive or negative.

   C. Feedback should either seek to change or reinforce actions and behavior.

   D. Negative feedback regarding something over which the employee has no control should not be given.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Provide some examples of how information has flowed through the employee grapevine where you work now or where you have worked in the past. Was the information gathered from the employee grapevine accurate

or inaccurate? How do you know this? If you have not had work experience, use the student grapevine as your source for this assignment. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

2. Do your own Web research on Internet etiquette, or *netiquette.* Give examples of the types of communication shortcuts that can be used when sending or replying to e-mail. How do these shortcuts impede the communication process, or do they? Be specific and be prepared to share your work with the class.

3. In your own words, explain the difference between active and passive listening. At what times might passive listening be preferred to active listening and vice versa? Provide examples of a conversation you have had with a friend or a coworker when it was clear to you that the person to whom you were speaking was passively listening. How did this make you feel? Why?

4. Construct three separate e-mail messages that would properly address each of the following scenarios: (1) a message to your boss explaining why last month's food cost percent in the restaurant was 11 percentage points over budget, (2) a message to all eight of your front-office employees requiring them to attend a mandatory meeting at which you plan on discussing methods to raise the hotel's average daily rate, and (3) a reply e-mail message to a travel agent who has e-mailed you requesting a travel agent discount for a night on which the hotel will likely be sold out. Compare your messages with those of at least one other student. How are they similar? How are they different? Be specific and provide examples to the rest of the class.

5. Following is a list of industry jargon (words, phrases, abbreviations) that is common in the hospitality and tourism industry. Review the list and write the meaning of those items on the list with which you are familiar. If you are unfamiliar with some words or phrases, conduct a general Internet search to learn their meanings. Compare your list with that of a fellow classmate. How do your lists differ? In what ways are they the same? Is the use of industry jargon beneficial in some way or is it problematic? Explain your answer.

ASAE	Bureau	FAM	IATA number
ASTA	CVB	MPI	No-show
B&B	Citywide	Rack rate	RFP
Blitz	Cover	SMERF	Site visit
DMC	Eighty-six	Walk	WTO

HANDS-ON HRM

Erica Stiles used to love her job as a line cook at the Third Street Bar & Grill. The money was good, the chef was great about working around Erica's school schedule, and she had a lot of fun working with the other employees at the restaurant. Things could not have been better for Erica, but all that changed when the chef called everyone together early one afternoon for a very important meeting.

"Guys," said Chef Todd, "you know we've only been open a year, and already, business is booming. The owners are so pleased," he continued, "that they've decided to open another location downtown." Chef Todd explained that the restaurant's owners had requested that he immediately transfer to the new location so that he could take charge of all of the preopening activities. "Wow, that's great," said a few of the kitchen employees. "But what about us?" asked Erica. "I mean, who will we report to now?"

"Well, that's one of the reasons I called all of you in," said Chef Todd. "We have decided to promote Keith here to the position of sous chef, so you guys will now report to him, and he'll continue to report to me."

The kitchen suddenly became very quiet as each of the employees looked at one other, somewhat astonished. Keith Berryman was a decent line cook, but that was about it. Most of the employees felt that he had a holier-than-thou attitude, since he and Chef Todd had worked together at a couple of other restaurants before coming to the Third Street Bar & Grill. "I'll expect each of you to follow Keith's lead in all matters," said Chef Todd. "I know he'll make a good boss, and besides, I'm not leaving; I just won't be around everyday like before."

Although she had concerns about the decision to promote Keith, Erica put on her best smile, walked up to Keith, extended her hand, and said, "Congratulations, Keith. I know I'll learn a lot by working for you." Slowly, the other employees too came up and offered Keith their congratulations.

As Chef Todd gathered his briefcase and left the kitchen, Keith announced, "Listen up, everybody. We're going to make a few changes around here, starting with the schedule. In the morning," he said, "you'll find your new work schedules posted on my office bulletin board. And I don't want to hear any whining about day care issues, school schedules, or hot Saturday night dates. We've got a restaurant to run."

With that, Keith went into the chef's office, closed the door, propped his feet on the desk, and thought to himself, "I've finally arrived."

"This is terrible," said Jason, one of the other line cooks. "If his new scheduling system messes up my day care arrangements, I could lose custody of my kids." "Tell me about it," added Jennifer, one of the restaurant's two pastry chefs. "My boyfriend and I only have one car, and he makes a lot more money than I do, so I have to rely on him for transportation." Erica had already thought about these things when she added, "I can't adjust my school schedule at all, and this is my last semester." "I can't even quit," she said, "because this job is my final internship, and I could flunk out of school if I don't get through this."

As the evening wore on, the restaurant got busier and busier, but Keith remained in the chef's office, only coming out once or twice for a few moments to scrutinize the plates being picked up by the servers. Near the end of the evening, he came out again, grabbed a salad plate off of a server's tray, and took it to Erica who was at the garde manger station that evening.

"Hey, culinary student," he said to Erica, loudly enough for everyone else to hear. "Don't they teach you anything about portion control at that school of yours? This salad is way too big." He slid the salad plate toward Erica and said, "Remake it, and do it right this time. In the real world, we call this controlling food cost." As Erica stood with an embarrassed look on her face, he wheeled around, went back into the chef's office, and slammed the door behind him.

Everyone in the kitchen watched as Erica methodically remade the salad. "I can't believe what a jerk he's being, Erica," said Jason. "That salad looked perfect to me." "No kidding," added Jennifer. "This promotion has already gone to his head; I can see we're all in for some real hell." Erica, laughing, said, "Oh, he's just practicing 'seagull management,' that's all." "What?" asked Jason, as the other line cooks looked at Erica. "Just something one of my professors told us in class last week," she said. "You know, like a seagull, the manager flies in, makes a lot of noise, dumps on everybody, then flies off again."

QUESTIONS ▶

1. Could Chef Todd have approached this meeting with his kitchen staff in a better, more organized fashion? What were some problems with the way he chose to communicate the restaurant's news to the employees?

2. What feedback errors and communication blunders has Keith made during his first evening as sous chef of the restaurant? How can he overcome these errors and reestablish good employee morale?

3. Should the rest of the kitchen staff go to Chef Todd with their concerns? What might be the result if they do? If you were in Chef Todd's shoes, how might you counsel the newly promoted sous chef?

4. Should things get worse for Erica, should she quit and, thus, terminate her internship, which may delay her graduation, or should she stick it out? Explain the reasons for you response.

KEY TERMS ▶

Communication process The method by which information is delivered from a sender to a receiver.

Communication systems Provides formal and informal methods for moving information throughout an organization.

Management-by-walking-around (MBWA) Managers exhibit this method of management when they leave their offices and engage employees one-on-one at their workstations.

Informal communication methods May be written or verbal; examples include open door policies, the employee grapevine, and MBWA.

Employee grapevine Informal communication that arises spontaneously from the social interaction of people in the organization.

Formal communication methods May be written or verbal; examples include memos, reports, employee suggestion boxes, newsletters, and meetings.

Open-door policy A company policy whereby the manager's door is always open to employees who may wish to voice a complaint or state an issue.

Downward communication Information that flows down the chain of command to set policy, to provide information, and to influence others.

Upward communication Information that flows from the lower levels of the organization to the higher levels. This often represents information initiated by employees who seek to inform or influence those who are higher in the corporate hierarchy.

Employee suggestion box A common tool used to seek employee input where employees write suggestions or cost-saving ideas and drop them in a box. Management will later retrieve the suggestions submitted by employees and review them.

Passive listening Hearing but not processing the information being sent.

Active listening A concentrated effort to focus and to fully understand the message that is being sent.

Positive feedback Employee feedback that seeks to boost morale and reinforce positive behavior or actions.

Negative feedback Employee feedback that serves to correct behavior that is unacceptable and that does not conform to performance standards. It is essential that negative feedback focuses on the employee's behavior, rather than on the employee personally.

NOTES

1. J. W. Marriott, Jr., and Kathi Ann Brown, *The Spirit to Serve Marriott's Way* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1997).
2. Ibid.
3. Dawn Sagario, "Pssst! Have You Heard that Gossip may be Damaging to the Workplace?" *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY) October 31, 2005, sec 2D.
4. William B. Werther and Keith Davis, *Human Resources and Personnel Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993).