

# **Chapter 3**

# **Interpersonal**

# **Communications**

**3 Hours**



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**Arkansas Basic Telecommunicator Course**

## **References:**

APCO Institute Public Safety Telecommunicator 1, Seventh Edition; 2016

IFSTA Telecommunicator, First Edition; 2001 Springhill

## **Training Aids:**

Prezi Presentation  
Computer  
Practical Exercise

## **Coordination/Personnel:**

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## **Instructional Unit Summary:**

Chapter 3 Interpersonal Communications

### **Lesson Purpose:**

To provide an overview of effective communications skills in PSAP Centers.

### **Instructional Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this block, the student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate ability to communicate the principals of interpersonal communications.
2. Demonstrate the ability to explain verbal and non-verbal communications.
3. Demonstrate the ability to explain the five components of the communications cycle.
4. Demonstrate the tips to becoming a better communicator
5. Demonstrate the knowledge of communication techniques.
6. Demonstrate six steps in becoming an active listener.
7. Demonstrate the ability to ask closed-ended or open-ended questions.
8. Demonstrate knowledge of customer service skills.
9. Demonstrate the knowledge of the do's and don'ts of effective communications.
10. Demonstrate knowledge of problem solving & critical thinking.
11. Demonstrate knowledge of diversity/demographics.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Interpersonal communications is an exchange of information between two or more people. The basic process of communication begins when a fact is observed or an idea is formulated by one person and they relay the information to another person. For the dispatcher the ability to effectively communicate with others whether by phone, radio or in person is the most important skill of the job. Where most Telecommunicators typically use nonvisual methods of communicating; some have responsibilities that require them to talk to the public face to face on a daily bases.

Although speaking is important, being a good Telecommunicator also involves being a good listener, asking the right questions and processing relevant information. This lesson will explain the cycle of communication and skills to make us better communicators.

## **II. BODY**

### **A. Types of Communication**

1. **Verbal Communications:** the ability to communicate through words.
2. **Nonverbal Communications:** is the process of sending and receiving wordless, mostly visual messages. Communications is not just the words we speak, but the way we speak, and the body language displayed during the communication.

### **B. The Communication Cycle**

1. The communication cycle is the complete process of communication, right from the beginning, to a response or an acknowledgment of the communicated message. It consists of five basic parts:

- a. The Sender is the person who initiates the communication.
- b. The Receiver is the person who is the target of the communication. A Telecommunicator may be either the sender or the receiver. When working as the call taker and interacting with the caller, the Telecommunicator is the receiver. When the Telecommunicator relays the call, they become the sender.
- c. The message is the idea. The message is the reason for any communications. The way the message is formatted may make a difference in the effectiveness of the message.
- d. The medium is the method in which the message is transferred from the sender to the receiver. Much importance is attached to the manner in which the message is delivered.
- e. Feedback is the message from the receiver to the sender to verify the message was understood. Senders must receive feedback from receivers. Without feedback, the message may not have been completely understood.

C. Tips to become a better communicator

- 1. Being a good communicator involves more than just talking - such as listening and questioning.
  - a. Slow your speech and speak clearly.
  - b. Focus on the caller: it may be a responder or someone in need of help. Whoever it is and whatever the situation actively engage your mind to make sense of what is being said.

- c. Actively engage your mind to make sense of what is being said.
  - d. Clarify by asking questions or paraphrase to let the caller know that you understand the information. Simple information like, names, addresses and an accurate description of what is going on, are all important information that is sometimes lacking and could be critical for everyone involved.
  - e. Filter through your information and decide what is immediately necessary to the responder and what information can wait.
  - f. Respond to the caller/radio traffic letting them know that you understand. Don't assume or guess at the information given. Dispatchers need to get the right information from callers, so they can send out the right people to assist with the emergency.
  - g. Encourage the caller to keep talking if possible by asking the right questions and demonstrating your concern.
2. Do's of Dispatching
- a. Retain a voice inflection, which is friendly.
  - b. Stay focused and be clear and direct with the caller or unit.
  - c. Do paraphrase in order to keep radio traffic to a minimum, or to restate the story being told by the caller.
  - d. Do ask the right questions.

- e. Do learn to assess the situation based on what is and what is not being said.
3. Do nots of Dispatching
- a. Don't assume that you know everything that is going on. Even though the caller has called multiple times, every situation is different.
  - b. Don't judge the caller on the information given or the words they use to describe it. The information is not always accurate or truthful and sometimes will lack important details. Dispatch the information pertinent to the call and add any other details to your notes.
  - c. Don't try to do too many things at once. Even though telecommunicators are gifted multi-taskers, each caller deserves your undivided attention.
  - d. Do not assume every call will be exactly the same.
  - e. Do not react or get upset.
  - f. Do not interrupt unless needed.
  - g. Don't get complacent. The dictionary definition of complacency is to be self-satisfied or comfortable to the degree of becoming unaware of potential danger. What happens when the Telecommunicator doesn't find it necessary to do a status check, a trainer may not be as enthusiastic about new methods, a dispatcher doesn't see the point in sending an officer on that same ole' call, or the manager thinks that the complaints aren't worth investigating?

Officers are not safe. Calls go unanswered.  
Lives can be lost. Lawsuits will be filed.

D. Communication Techniques

1. Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.
  - a. Listening is key to all effective communication. If there is one communication skill we should all aim to master, it would be listening. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and an incident could turn catastrophic.
  - b. Listening means paying attention to not only the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and where the caller is emotionally. If you are face to face, it can mean being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.
  - c. Listening can have a major impact on our job since we listen to obtain information, to understand the need of the caller, and to learn as much as we can.
2. Active listening is one way to improve your listening skills. In order to do this we have to pay careful attention to what the other person is saying. You cannot allow yourself to become distracted or to think about what about what your reply will be before the caller has a chance to finish.

E. Becoming an Active Listener



1. Five steps to active listening. These help ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.
  - a. Pay attention: give the speaker your undivided attention. Put aside distraction thoughts; for example: side conversations.
  - b. Show that you are listening by nodding occasionally or encouraging the speaker with small verbal comments.
  - c. Provide feedback by summarizing the caller's comment or paraphrasing.
  - d. Defer judgment. Interrupting with a counter opinion or argument is a waste of time. You cannot change life-long views in a 3 minute phone call.
  - e. Respond appropriately by being open and honest in your response. Don't offer solutions that you can't produce.

F. Questions

1. Asking Questions: Telecommunicators have to ask certain questions to help clarify information
  - a. Open-ended questions really tell the story of what is happening. These questions can be answered with either simple or elaborate responses. Open-ended questions are used by Telecommunicators to obtain detailed information about the incident.

*Example:* Can you tell me what happened?
  - b. Closed – ended questions can help the Telecommunicator get a quick answer to

many questions and eliminate any non-relevant information.

*Example: Do you need an ambulance?*

#### G. Customer Service

1. Who are our customers? Our customers are the general public, first responders, and any additional resources needed to handle the call for service.
2. The moment a phone or radio is answered customer service begins. You represent your agency as well as any police, fire, or ambulance that you send. Most citizens don't realize that the PSAP Center may not be directly connected to the agency that responds. Your professionalism may have a direct impact on the way the responder is treated upon arrival and the caller's opinion of EMS in the future.
3. People respond to crisis in different ways. They may be frightened, embarrassed, calm or hysterical. They may not tell the story in the sequin we want them to or are used to. Try to get the information without offending the caller or delaying the response.

#### H. Etiquette

1. Etiquette is a behavior in a social or professional setting. There are certain rules that apply when Telecommunicators are talking with citizens and responders. Whether you are on the phone or on the radio, you are representing your agency.
2. Always attempt to be courteous and professional. Remember, you probably won't be talking to the caller at their best moment. They call because they need help and have an expectation that you will take

care of the problem. A dispatcher brings more than calm to caller. They bring hope.

3. Telephone etiquette should include:
  - a. Making certain that you know how your phone system works.
  - b. End all of your conversations before you answer the (recording starts prior to picking up the receiver).
  - c. Avoid eating, drinking, or chewing before you answer the phone.
  - d. Be polite.
  - e. Be patient.
  - f. Practice active listening
  - g. Speak clearly.
  - h. Reduce your rate of speech.
  - i. Repeat or rephrase.
  - j. Use professional language.
  - k. Ask permission before putting a caller on hold.
  - l. Smile-callers can hear a smile in your voice.
4. Voice Inflection: An alteration in the pitch or tone determines if the message is perceived as friendly or rude. The tone of a person's voice may portray their attitude.
5. Acronyms: Avoid using acronyms when speaking to members of the public. They may not be familiar with the organizational jargon. Instead use common words to describe the activity or function.
6. Positive Statement: Provide the caller with positive statements that indicates they are being heard.
7. Background Noises: Noises heard in the background can assist Telecommunicators in understanding what activities are taking place. Examples would be shots fired, glass breaking, people screaming, children

crying, etc. Background noises: Are you listening to other conversations? Is there too much traffic? Are there visitors in the room?

H. Speech: The following are some basic guidelines for maintain good verbal communications:

1. Speak clearly, because you may only have one chance to deliver the message. Clarity: effective verbal communications begins with clarity. This often requires nothing more than slowing down and speaking with assurance. Make sure your enunciation and diction can be understood in normal conversation.
2. Most people speak around 150 words a minute. If you are relaying information, make sure the receiver has time to write the message down. Provide pauses when speaking so the caller has time to understand the message.
3. Volume: If a person speaks too softly, the receiver may not hear the message, or the message may be misinterpreted. If the person is too loud the message may be distorted.

I. Problem Solving & Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking about any situation where the thinker has to analyze, assess and reconstruct the situation. Telecommunicators have a small time frame to put together the pieces so they can then dispatch the appropriate services. This may be difficult at times because:

1. People under stress do not always give the correct answers.

2. Callers may be in pain, afraid, or in a state of shock and cannot focus on or forget the answers to the simplest of questions.
3. Communication with individuals that are highly stressed and/or in a state of shock is very different from normal conversations.
4. Empathy: helps open communication channels. It allows the caller to feel understood and free to communicate their feelings.
5. Patience: A deep sigh or gesture of disgust could cause a breakdown in communications.

J. Diversity/Demographics

1. Emergencies are not specific to any certain area or group of people. Telecommunicators interact with a variety of individuals with various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, which may mean they respond differently to situations. Some differences that influence the way people react are:
  - a. Race
  - b. Culture
  - c. Gender
  - d. Religion
  - e. Generation
  - f. Economical
  - g. Educational
  - h. Outside Influences
2. Institutional discrimination refers to any type of unjust practice of discriminatory behavior toward any type of unjust practice of discriminatory behavior toward a person or groups of people by government, agencies, businesses, or public institutions.

### III. Conclusion

An important link in interpersonal communications is the relationship between a Telecommunicator and the caller. Breakdowns in communication are often responsible for mistakes and misunderstandings in both our professional and personal life.