



## Constant Contact

*By Lyn Carman*

Part 2 of 4-part leadership series

***“A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other.”*** – Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

It's been some time since I introduced this series and I want to make sure we're all on the same page by briefly recapping the definition and context of leadership relevant for this part.

I believe as oral health professionals we are all leaders. The definition of leadership that resonates with me, as mentioned in the introductory article, encompasses the ability to influence, inspire, and support others in reaching their full potential.

This definition is applicable in all areas of life, whether it's at home with the family, professional settings, business endeavours, social interactions, patient care, public encounters, nurturing relationships with pets, or even during seemingly ordinary moments throughout each day. It emphasises the pervasive nature of leadership and the opportunity to make a positive impact in every aspect of our lives.

Communication, where do I begin? Trying to condense the vast topic of communication into a short article that communicates better understanding is indeed a challenge – see what I did there?

Communication is everything! Communication connects us, enables expression of thoughts and emotions, fosters collaboration, resolves conflicts, influences others, facilitates learning, contributes to professional success, and promotes empathy. Developing strong communication skills allows us to navigate life's challenges effectively and thrive in our interactions with others.

Effective communication provides numerous benefits in many aspects of life, including personal relationships, professionally, and leadership roles and is at the heart of all our relationships. However, many of us don't consistently make the time to intentionally muscle and improve our skill level.

Just like developing and improving any skill effective communication requires conscious effort and is a lifelong learning process. In our daily interactions, intentional or not, we are constantly communicating with others... and involves far more than just the words we choose.

According to Merriam-Webster, communication is defined as: "The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else."

Improving communication skills as an individual can greatly enhance your ability to connect with others and convey your thoughts effectively. Here are some tips on how to communicate better along with my favourite mantras to serve as reminders:

- **Active Listening:** Being fully present, giving your full attention to the speaker, avoiding distractions and maintaining eye contact. Showing genuine interest, asking clarifying questions and reflecting on what is being said BEFORE responding.

***Remember: Listen to understand not just to respond***

- **Clear and Concise Messaging:** Be mindful of your own communication style. Your message needs to be clear, concise, and easily understandable. Avoid using complex jargon or convoluted language that may confuse or alienate your listener. Instead, aim for simplicity and brevity, ensuring your ideas are easily grasped and remembered.

***Remember: KISS principal – Keep it Short and Simple***

- **Non-Verbal Communication:** Pay attention to your non-verbal cues, such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Maintain open and confident body posture, use appropriate gestures, and ensure your tone matches your intended message. Non-verbal signals can significantly impact how your message is received.

***Remember: What you DO speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say***

- **Empathy and Understanding:** Cultivate empathy to better understand others' perspectives and emotions. Put yourself in their shoes, be receptive to their feelings, and respond with empathy and understanding. This helps build trust and fosters effective communication by creating a safe and supportive environment.

***Remember: Seek first to understand and then to be understood***

- **Feedback:** Provide feedback in a respectful and tactful manner. Focus on specific behaviours or actions, be objective, and offer suggestions for improvement. Likewise, be open to receiving feedback from others and use it as an opportunity for personal growth and development. We all need people who will give us feedback – this is how we improve.

***Remember: There is no failure, only feedback***

- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Recognise that different individuals have unique communication styles and different situations require different communication approaches. Be adaptable and flexible in your approach, tailoring your communication to the needs and preferences of others and the situation. Adjust your communication style to connect better with different personalities and cultural backgrounds.

***Remember: Misunderstandings can happen from different communication styles.***

- **Transparency and Authenticity:** Authenticity is key to building trust and credibility. Be transparent in your interactions, share information openly, and be honest about challenges and setbacks. Others will appreciate your genuine approach, and it will foster a culture of open communication and collaboration.

***Remember: Say what you mean and mean what you say***

- **Practice and Seek Opportunities:** Communication skills improve with practice. Look for opportunities to engage in conversations, presentations, or public speaking. Seek feedback from trusted individuals and make a conscious effort to apply their suggestions. The more you practice, the more confident and effective you will become.

**Remember the quote from George Bernard Shaw “The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place”**

In all aspects of life, from personal relationships to professional endeavours, effective communication is the cornerstone that empowers us to overcome challenges, inspire others, and create meaningful impact.

