



## Barriers to Communication

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### Introduction

Communication plays a most important role in employer-employee relationships on farm operations. It also affects the relationships among family members on the management team. Although effective communication does not guarantee success of a farm operation, its absence usually assures problems. A communication problem may soon become a disaster or it may linger on for years.

No matter how good the communication systems in an operation are, communication barriers can and do often occur. This may be caused by a number of reasons that can usually be summarized as being due to physical barriers, system design faults, or additional barriers.

**Physical barriers** are often due to the nature of the environment.

One natural barrier is when managers and employees are located in different buildings or on different sites of the operation.

Likewise, poor or outdated equipment, particularly the failure of management to introduce new technology, may also cause problems.

Employee shortages are another factor that frequently cause communication difficulties for an operation.

While distractions like noise, poor lighting or an environment that is too hot or cold can all affect people's spirits and concentration, which in turn interfere with effective communication.

Not having an office and lunchroom area where employees may gather.

**System design faults** refer to problems with the structures or systems in place in an operation.

Examples might include an organizational structure that is unclear and therefore makes it confusing to know who you are to communicate with.

Other examples could be inefficient or inappropriate information systems, a lack of supervision or training, and a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities that can lead to employees being uncertain about what is expected of them.

**Attitudinal barriers** come about because of problems with employees in an operation.

These may be brought about by things as poor management, lack of consultation with employees, personality conflicts which can result in people delaying or refusing to communicate, the personal attitudes of individual employees which may be due to lack of motivation or dissatisfaction at work, brought about by insufficient training to enable them to carry out particular tasks, or just resistance to change due to entrenched attitudes and ideas.

### **Additional Barriers to Effective Communication**

- **Psychological factors** such as employee's state of mind. We all tend to feel happier and more receptive to information when the sun shines. Equally, if someone has personal problems like worries about their health, family, or marriage, then this will probably affect them.
- **Different languages** and cultures represent a national barrier that is particularly important for operations involved multicultural employees.
- **Individual linguistic ability** is also important. The use of difficult or inappropriate words in communication can prevent people from understanding the message. Poorly explained or misunderstood messages can also result in confusion.
- **Physiological barriers** may result from individuals' personal discomfort, caused, for example, by ill health, poor eye sight or hearing difficulties.

### **Communication Model**

To communicate effectively, we need to be recognizing the factors involved in the communication method. When we are attentive of them, these factors will help us plan, analyze conditions, solve problems, and in general do better in our work.

A simple communications model identifies the main components in the communication method. The method starts with a **sender (manager)** who has a **message (instructions)** for a **receiver (employee)**. Two or more people are always involved in communication. The sender has the responsibility for the message.

The sender's message travels to the receiver through one or more **channels** chosen by the sender. The channels may be verbal or non-verbal. They may involve only one of the senses, hearing for example, or they may involve all five of the senses: hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Non-verbal communication, popularly referred to as body language, relies primarily on seeing rather than hearing.

### **Ways of Improving Communication**

In addition to the removal of specific barriers to communication, the following general guidelines may also facilitate communication.

1. Have a positive attitude about communication.
2. Work at improving communication skills.
3. Include communication as an evaluated skill along with all the other skills in each employee's job description.
4. Help managers and employees improve their communication skills by helping them understand their communication barriers.
5. Approach communication as a skill rather than simply a part of the job.
6. Experiment with communication alternatives.
7. Accept the reality of miscommunication.

## Summary

Communication is at the heart of many interpersonal problems faced by farm managers and employers. Understanding the communication process and then working at improvement provide managers and employees a formula for becoming more effective communicators. Knowing the common barriers to communication is the first step to minimizing their impact. When taking stock of how well you are doing as a manager, first ask yourself and others how well you are doing as a communicator.

### Questions:

1. What are the three major barriers to effective communications?
2. What are the main components of an effective communications model?
3. List ways to improve communication in your farm operation.

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