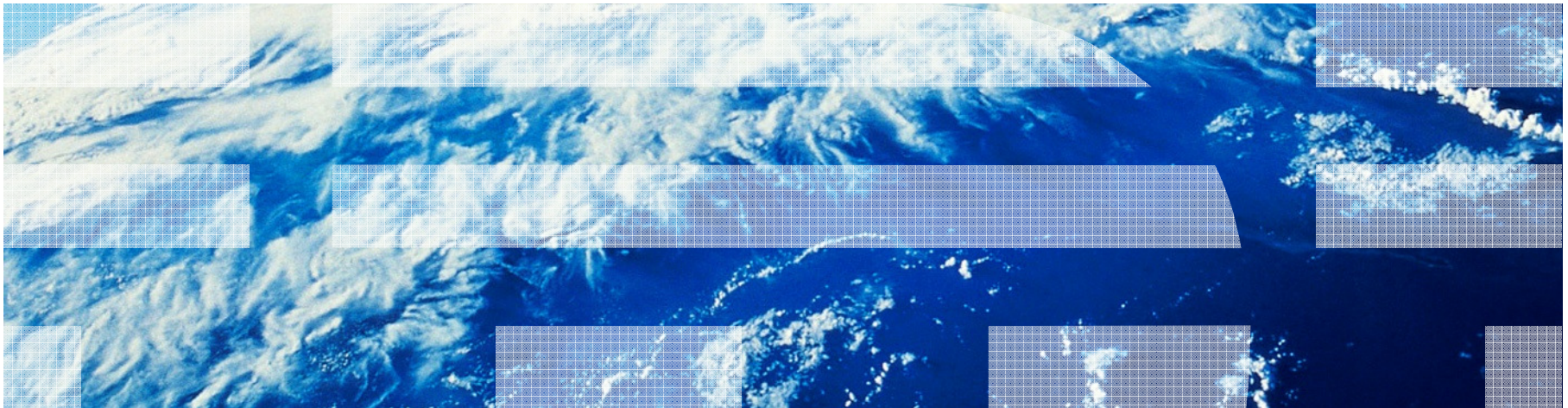# Cloud & Smarter Infrastructure
Primary Support Provider Delivery Guide

Lesson 4 – Communication Best Practices

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This lesson covers the following topics:

- Communication Best Practices

- What can go wrong

- Tools for your tool box

Communications Best Practices

- The support professional has a direct impact on the quality of customer service and the level of customer satisfaction

- Support professionals are front of the line and a reflection of the company

- Communications is key

- Honing our communications practices to give our business a competitive edge through exceeding customer expectations

- High quality support leads to factors that generate revenue such as customer loyalty, word of mouth, and increased renewals

- A process between at least two people, which begins when one person wants to communicate with another

- Mental images are translated into symbols by the *sender* in a process, which is called "encoding"

- Encoded messages are then transmitted to the *receiver* who goes through their own process of "decoding"

- If everything goes properly, the message is understood and communication has occurred
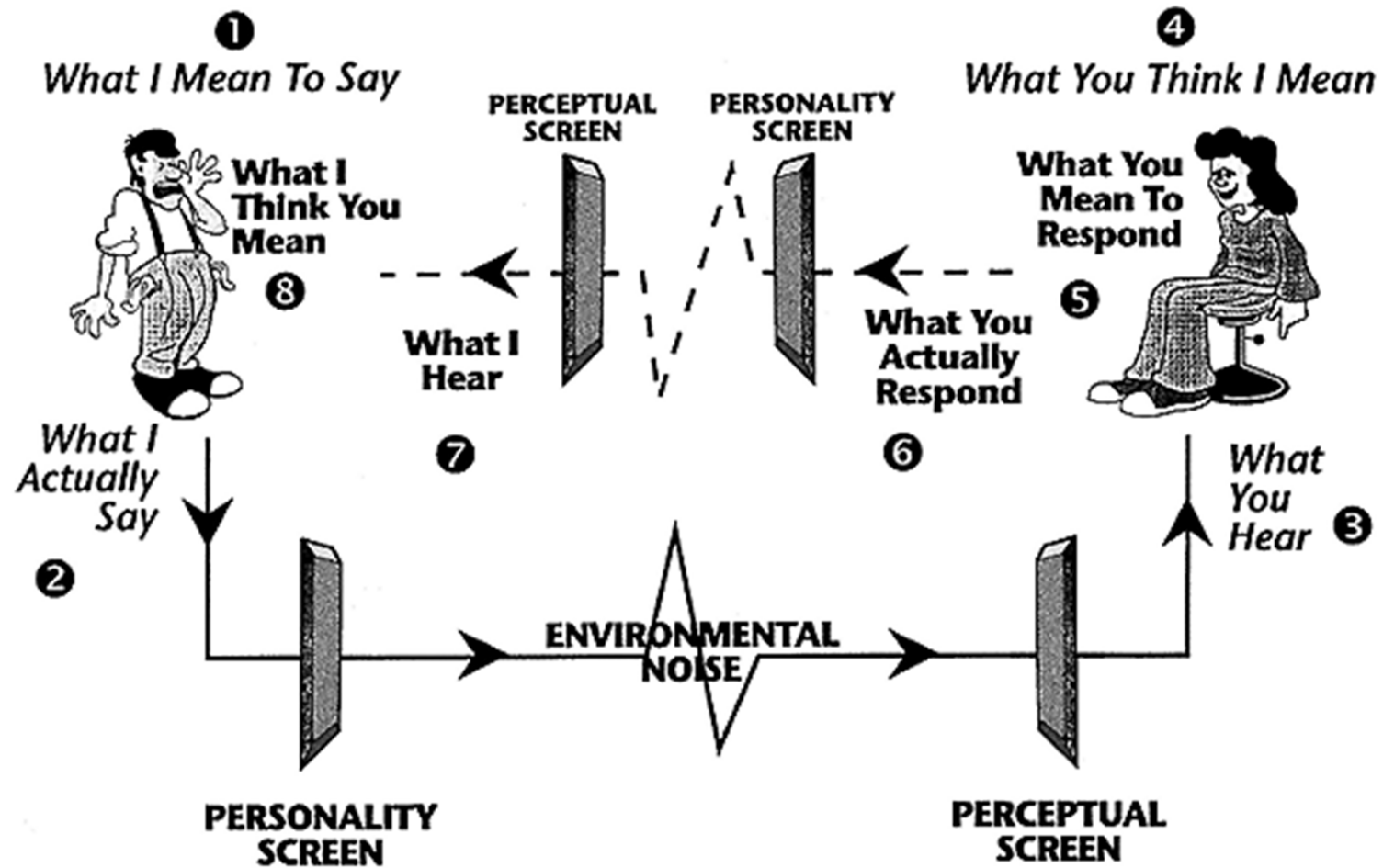
- Personality Screen

- Perceptual Screen

- Environmental Noise
  - Physical noise
  - Psychological noise

- Listening versus Hearing

Personality Screen

- Affects how we send messages to others

- Has its roots in life experiences, upbringing, education and personal history

- Includes language, body language, dialect, tone of voice, and more

- What we think in our heads might be very different from the message that we send

- Affects how we receive messages from others

- Has its roots in life experiences, upbringing, education and personal history

- Includes native language, disabilities, prejudices, cultural differences, and more

- The message that another sends to you might have a very different meaning from what you hear

- Physical or Psychological elements that can disrupt effective communication

- Physical noise is anything that has to do with the environment in which the communication is taking place

- Psychological noise pertains to the internal mechanisms that restrict the ability of a sender or receiver to effectively express or understand messages

Listening versus Hearing

Listening is:
- active psychological
- reflecting back to you, your answers and concerns
- being involved
- tuned in
- remember positive non-verbal

Hearing is:
- passive physiological
- hearing the words
- not paying attention
- not being focused on the customer

Active ⟷ **Passive**

Responding is:
- positive
- thinking the problem through with the customer
- a way to demonstrate your ability to stay professional

Reacting:
- is negative, shows ego
- might cause you to challenge the customer
- allows your negative emotions to separate you from the customer

- Manage the perceptions and expectations of the customers

- Maintain a zone of professionalism

- Manage the customer encounter

- Be a team player

- Use effective communication techniques

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- Making and meeting commitments is vital

- Establish a sense of ownership of the issue early in the process

- How do we manage or change expectations?

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- Remain professional no matter what the clients say to you

- Use *empathy* to diffuse emotion

- Realign unrealistic expectation early in the process

- Reaffirm that we are here to help them

Manage the Customer Encounter

- Use positive reinforcement

- Put yourself in their place

- Make the entire experience a positive one

- Make use of inclusive language: we – us – you and I

- Keep the client informed of what is happening throughout the process

Use Effective Communication Techniques

- Use active listening techniques and a variety of communications styles

- Confirm understanding of the issue often

- Keep communication simple and straightforward

When pursuing a questioning strategy, we must be aware of the types of questions that we are using

Open *versus* Closed questions

- Used appropriately, these questions allow you to identify the required information

- Used inappropriately, these questions lead to frustration and wasted time

- The Angry Customer

- The Aggressive Customer

- The Rude Customer

- The Customer Who Interrupts

- Let them vent. Use empathetic comments

- Remember that it is not a personal attack

- Stay professional

- After you have listened, acknowledged, explored, and responded, stop talking!

- Give the customer time to accept the plan of action

- Might want services that you cannot deliver

- Stay calm and firm where company policy is at stake

- Use your skills at resetting expectations

- Use your empathetic skills

- Remain polite and professional, no matter what

- Remain polite and professional, no matter what

- Let them finish talking

- Actively listen

- Do not interrupt

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- Be quiet and listen again

- Do not try to interrupt them

- Use the your active listening skills, summarizing and confirming what you hear

- Includes breathing, posture, expression, and gestures

- Breathing is affected by posture, so sit up straight and relax

- Use body language that would be appropriate if the customer was present

- Modulate you voice by doing the following:
- Keep your emotions under control.
- Stay professional

- Keep a neutral tone. Don't be loud or overbearing

- Vary the speed and volume of your speech to offset the pace and volume of the customer

Choice of Words

- Use simple, basic English. Avoid jargon. Intelligence is not measured by superior vocabulary, but by your ability to get the message across as clearly as possible

- Jargon separates you from the customer

- Try to capture the customer's terminology and then confirm what they are saying by echoing more generic terminology

- People's names are important

- Use the person's name whenever possible

- Introduce yourself at the beginning and mention your name at the end of the call

- Look forward to every customer encounter - there is always something to be learned, and each encounter is an opportunity to build our customer's loyalty and support for your organization and its products

- Keep chit-chat and jokes to a minimum

- Choose your words carefully. Avoid the negatives: can't, won't, not allowed. Instead, stress what you can and will do

- Try to forget your own feelings. Think only of the customer's well being

- Don't be in a hurry to end the call

- Be confident. If you don't know the answer, you can always find out!

- Phone – lacks body language and other nonverbal cues

- E-mail – lacks even tone of voice, inflection, and often context

When not to use e-mail:

- You cannot risk a breach of privacy. You might have confidence about the privacy at our end, but what about the receiving end?

- You are delivering unpleasant news that requires tact and empathy

- If there is a chance the message might be misunderstood, use another form of communication

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✓ **Use active voice**

(Who is doing what to whom?)

Passive voice example:
"It is possible for the team to investigate and close those cases by the end of the month."

Active voice example:
"The team will close those cases by the end of the month."

✓ Use a conversational tone

- Pretend that you are at a work-related party

✓ Contractions aren't bad

- You can end a sentence with a preposition
- Use I, We, and You. Connect on a human level or use a person's name.
- You can start your sentence with a coordinating conjunction, for example: and, or, nor, but, so, yet

Special Considerations for E-mail

✓ Avoid "fight" words

⊠   Mistaken

⊠   Failed

⊠   Overlooked

⊠   Misled

⊠   Ignored

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✓ Avoid humor.

- This is difficult to do when the receiver has the exact same cultural and language background
- Humor is potentially disastrous when language and background differ

✓ Avoid clichés.

Bad – Redundant modifiers, for example: official e-mail from corporate, seriously destroying our earth

Really bad – Redundant pairs, for example: if and when, each and every, ready and willing

Never acceptable – Compound constructions, for example: at that point in time, in the event that, subsequent to

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- Occasionally, we have to refer to rules or operating procedures that you have been asked to follow

- The customer does not care about our rules, but they do care about benefits

- Explain the benefit. If you can't, then reconsider the rule. To quote rules without benefits comes across as a stalling tactic

- Note the following good example: The issues must be logged, but the support person is telling the customer the benefit of logging the issues separately

- "If we log that issue as a separate call, then we'll ensure that the issue does not get lost or confused with the original issue"

Make good use of the subject line

- Use the subject line

Case #12345 – Please provide test results

- Use similar statements at the beginning of the message

"This message pertains to case #12345 - to meet the pending deadline, please provide your test results by the end of this week"

Watch the tone in directives

- Poor example:

"Please send the test case by the end of tomorrow. Send it directly to me"

- Good example:

"Your implementation date is approaching quickly, so please send the test case directly to me by the end of tomorrow"

Remember the basics:

- Clear, concise subject line with impact

- Use a strong lead-in sentence

- Don't ignore basic punctuation, spelling, and use of uppercase and lowercase

- Use bullets and numbered lists for clarity and emphasis

- Use paragraphs, headings, and other formatting to organize a long message

- Always use the spelling and grammar checkers

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- Think of yourself as the company, because you are the company to this customer

- Think: "I am in charge - I can take care of this customer"

- You have the right to make your own decisions on how best to take care of the customer (remember to inform your manager of any unusual situations)

- Use empathy to diffuse emotion

- Use active listening with frequent summarizing and confirming

- Use inclusive language: we, us, you and I

- Remember the role of open and closed questions and use them appropriately

- Use the most appropriate communication medium. Do not use e-mail unless you are sure that the message will be clearly understood

- Remember the special considerations for e-mail

END
Lesson 4