

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING SKILLS

A workshop paper delivered to Senior Executives in Public and Private Sector Organisations at the Nigerian Institute of Management, Northern Area Office, Abuja.

Many of us attending this workshop started work with somebody calling the shots. Overtime, we have grown to become the ones to give directives to others. Yet, there were many in the same organisation who probably had their eyes on a different type of job but have had to do with what is available and not what they considered as the ideal. We have all found ourselves here and I believe we really have to take our present jobs as the ideal and be proud of it. Life, after all, is what we make of it. We forget, too often, that our education is not an end in itself; it is the use we put it to that matters.

In the course of this workshop, we shall together take a good look at **Effective Communications and Report Writing Skills**. This topic is very well chosen, as the job you are engaged in is very strategic and critical to the overall image and reputation of an organisation. You are among the most important officers that an organisation would depend upon to act as the bridge between the management as they give the policy guidelines and the workers in terms of the way these policies are carried out. What you do or fail to do will therefore go a long way in determining how the public would assess your employers.

What follows now is a tripartite discussion on effective communication, human relations and report writing as important tools for organisational success. For the avoidance of doubt, I shall endeavour to make you, the Senior Executives, the primary focus of this presentation. Nonetheless, the universal application of communication would be discussed since you will have to teach your staffers how to communicate with people of all shades of opinion: literate and illiterate, urban and rural and the high and low in status. They are all

your customers and as you know, they are always right no matter what.

At the end of this discussion, each and every one of us should be able to appreciate the concept and dimensions of communication as it pertains to its use in effective communication, human relationships and report writing. The objectives of this paper can be summarised as follow:

- a. To facilitate a better understanding of interactivity within an organisation at the interpersonal, individual and inter-departmental levels.
- b. To know the strengths and weaknesses of individual's ability to communicate and relate well with other people.
- c. To develop improved skills in report writing for organisational efficiency.
- d. To encourage participants here to act as agents for propagating effective communication, excellent human relations and joint achievement of corporate goals of your various organisations.

Part One: Communication

What Is Communication?

Communication is the transfer of information and knowledge from a sender to a receiver with the information being understood by the receiver. In simpler terms, you may explain communication thus:

- The flow of information from a sender to a receiver
- Imparting, sharing or exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills

Having defined communication, how may we recognise it? In other words, what forms does it take and what are its constituents? Basically, there are four ways of communicating — Oral, Written, Non-verbal and Visual.

- * **Oral Communication** — This is the most frequently used and could be formal or informal. It is more accommodating as most human beings with little or no skill can engage in it. It is used at Meetings, Conferences, Seminars, Training, Telephone conversations, Broadcasts and Interviews.
- * **Written Communication** — Used for important, factual, complex and long-term purposes. It is used for Reports and

Publications. To be able to use this form of communication, a certain level of literacy and language competence is required.

- * **Visual Communication** — It comprises of Photographs, Facility Visits, Charts, Graphics, Posters.
- * **Non-Verbal Communication** — This is essentially done through visual expression such as gesticulation but without words or speech.

The Process and Element of Communication

Communication as indicated in the aforementioned definition takes place if and only if the message sent by the sender is received. This means that communication is effective when it is a two-way process. The method of knowing whether the process is completed is known as feedback. The roles of the sender and that of the receiver are interchangeable. In communication, the ability to receive the message is as important as the ability to send it. The illustration below explains this better:

SENDER ↔ Message ↔ Channel ↔ RECEIVER

Some terminologies have crawled into this discussion and there is need to explain them for the purpose of clarity. They are indeed the elements of communication.

- **Source** — The sender of the message (Individual, Group or Organisation)
- **Message** — The idea being sent to the receiver (Words whether spoken or written)
- **Channel** — The medium through which the message is sent to the receiver
- **Receive** — The person to whom the message is intended. He decodes the message to derive the desired meaning (Individual, Group or Organisation)

Other Characteristics of Communication

Since communication is a very wide area of study, our discussion on it would be on basic concepts of communication that are encountered everyday. These are the formality and location of communication.

Formal/Informal and Internal/External Communication

Internal Communication

Vertical: Downward and upward, from management to other staff and vice versa. Instructions/directives are passed down and reports are rendered upwards.

Horizontal: For information sharing among peers.

Diagonal: Outside the chain of command, random, impromptu and mixed.

External Communication

External communication has to do with all the outward-bound information from the organization to its audience. Much of these of course does not affect your jobs directly. Nonetheless, adequate attention should be paid to them as it concerns the external public of the organisation.

Formal Communication

Refers to official communication and relationships. Recommended and best for the job of frontline officials. You never know whom you are dealing with.

Informal Communication

This is the channel for gossips, rumours and unsubstantiated information. It is also the language of familiarity and friendship. As security people, it is not advisable to indulge in it either as receiver or as the disseminator (sender).

Telephone and Reception Ethics

To underscore the importance of your job, organisations, despite their limited resources, endeavour to equip their security personnel with as much tools as are basic to their operation. Such tools include: Telephone, Radio, Uniform, Torchlight, Transport, Office and many more. Among all these, we can discuss the communication tools, particularly the telephone.

Telephone (intercom) services are provided to reduce the drudgery of security/frontline duties. You need to know and understand the

protocol involved in the use of telephones and apply them appropriately. Some of such protocol include:

- Be polite, courteous, and respectful
- Be attentive and brisk (avoid such words as pardon, what, who)
- Restrict its usage for official purposes only
- Avoid familiarity and keep to only official exchanges (Language and Content)
- Never bang the phone under any circumstance.

Techniques of Effective Communication

To achieve effective communication, you are required to observe the following, such that you will not only communicate but get the desired response. The following six attributes have proved useful over time and are recommended for your application:

- i. Possess basic education with reasonable spoken and writing skills
- ii. Cultivate good listening habit
- iii. Develop an enquiring mind
- iv. Seek clarifications when in doubt
- v. Speak confidently, clearly and convincingly
- vi. Write (make) short and correct sentences.

Let me end this section on communication by drawing your attention to those things that can make communication difficult and ineffective. Below are eight of such hindrances to effective communication. Suffice to say that inappropriately communicated messages could cause very serious damage to the corporate image and goals of an organisation.

Barriers to Effective Communication

- Faulty message — ambiguity (unclear statements), poor use of language...
- Poor listening habit
- Inadequate or complete absence of feedback
- Individual differences — culture experience, values, perception, prejudices...

- Inappropriate channel selection and interference
- Information overload
- Information/communication distortion (filtering)
- Lack of confidence and trust.

Communication is as old as creation and we engage in it everyday of our lives. What has been said so far is to bring to your attention those things that you need to be conscious of as critical personnel who, more than your immediate responsibilities may suggest, constitute one of the most important image makers for your organisation — mind you I did not say public relations executive!

Part Two: Human Relations

What Is Human Relations?

- Human relations is the study of human behaviour at work, aimed at identifying appropriate actions that can lead to better results.
- The integration of people into a work situation that motivates them to work for productivity with economic, psychological and social satisfaction.
- Interaction of people in human organisations, including the home, school, social clubs and the work place.

Human beings are very complex. The things that were said yesterday and were received with approving smile could result in a serious brawl today. With human beings you can never be right. All you have to do, particularly as security personnel who require people to do what they least approve of, is to be polite, patient, understanding and co-operative. You want visitors to your organisation to fill the visitors register, you want them to wait outside till visiting time, you wish to frisk them in case they are carrying any offensive weapon or you decide to ask them why they want to see the officer they asked to see — hell could be let loose unless these acts are carried out with the greatest restraint and caution. No matter how wrong the visitor may turn out to be, you could still be the greater loser particularly if your

organisation is into business. Why do human beings behave the way they do? Why are they so unpredictable? How do you perform your duties and still make your customers feel well treated? I shall try to x-ray the whys and hows of human relations in the work place in as brief a manner as possible to enable us appreciate its importance to security services.

Variables in Human Relations

There are no two human beings that would behave, talk, like and do the same things all the time. Certain factors account for these differences which your duty as a supervising personnel requires you to know and use the knowledge in your dealings with your superior officers, colleagues and more importantly, the clients of your organisation. Good enough, you also train the staff that you oversee. These variables include “family background, goals, values, capability, interpersonal relationships, communication skill, attitudes, needs, goals and environmental influences.” All these combine together to condition the way human beings react to any situation they may be faced with.

- a. People are different, and could be properly categorised. Hence, every human being at the work place should be treated differently.
- b. The differences notwithstanding, there are some shared values, experiences, interests, language, cultures among people which make living together possible.
- c. There is a great element of rationality in human behaviour, a tendency to react to factors in the environment in a rational and sometimes, predictable way. This forms the basis for understanding human behaviour and relationship with people.

Factors Affecting Human Relations in an Organisation

If we recognise the complexities of the human nature, then it will be obvious that these tendencies would bring out different reactions to given situations within the organisation. As security operatives, your primary duty is ensuring the safety of men and materials of the organisation your work for. Nonetheless, you are first and foremost a bonafide staff member and therefore you would be concerned with the

overall goals and objective of the organisation. If any or some of the factors to be discussed below affect any personnel negatively, his productivity and indeed loyalty to the organisation may wane. The following should be of interest to the employers as well as the employees.

- Ill defined organisational goals and objectives
- Poor and ineffective communication
- Poor welfare package in terms of remuneration and career prospects
- Lack of team spirit
- Uncontrollable and extraneous environmental factors.

These problems could be tackled in a variety of ways. However, I would like to hinge the effective management of the human resources, in this case, on the security personnel in the work place.

People want to develop their capabilities, competencies and potentials as much as is humanly possible. Employees' performance at work is dependent on the interaction of some of these factors that could be summarised as listed below:

Knowledge	+ Skill	= Ability
Situation	+ Attitudes	= Motivation
Ability	+ Motivation	= Human Performance
Human Performance	+ Resources	= Organisational Performance

Supportive and Non-Supportive Managers:

As a Manager, one is expected to inspire the workers such that they perform at their optimum. Therefore, a supportive Manager will exhibit the following by:

- providing positive feedback
- recognising that an employee has a life outside the workplace
- engaging in a two-way communication with employees
- empowering employees

Conversely, an non-supportive Manager will be known for:

- displaying poor interpersonal skills — negative, inconsistent and poor leadership

- focusing on hours of work not output
- showing lack of respect for employees
- disempowering employees.

Suggestion on Effective Communication and Human Relations

As stated at the beginning of this discussion, you would be expected at the end of this programme to be able to educate and enlighten your colleagues who may not have the opportunity to be here today on the basic things you need to know to become a good security person.

1. Be polite, pleasant but firm
2. Ensure you communicate — send your message and get a feedback
3. Be good to people. Go the extra mile to help
4. Obey all the rules laid down by your organisation
5. Dress properly and ensure good conduct in and out of uniform
6. Avoid being familiar with clients and customers
7. Do not underestimate or look down on anybody
8. Strive to improve your knowledge and skill on a continuous basis
9. Be a good ambassador (representative) of your organisation
10. Be proud of your job, do it conscientiously and diligently.

Part Three: Report Writing

Reports are spot documents prepared in organisations for specific purposes. Such purposes may include meetings, research findings, periodic operational activity, accounts, annual reports, duty tours, employment interviews, investigation into employee conducts, survey on the competitors in the marketplace and many more activities in organisations. They are mainly meant for internal use but are often handy when there is need to communicate the progress being made by the organisation with the external audiences particularly the stakeholders and shareholders.

Report writing is usually taken for granted and so little attention has been paid to it in organisational scales of skill preference. Yet, the ability of an officer, a Supervisor for that matter, to write a clear and usable report may determine how efficient or otherwise, given the fact that he is always required to oversee what other people are doing.

Attributes of a Good Report

- Readability – short and active sentences, concrete terms, absence of jargons
- Legibility – good handwriting, use of visible typefaces, paragraphing, number of lines, width of columns, leading between lines (white spaces)
- Style – lucid, simple, expressive, and proper tenses
- Format – introduction, objective/purpose, the matter, action, suggestions, recommendation and conclusion
- Message – well packaged to be understood, or actions taken and feedback
- Language – simple and understandable, formal
- Content – only important points should be reflected
- Portability – can be carried around and read when needed
- Permanence – read, re-read, re-write and preserve
- Reinforce – messages and values
- Reduce – interferences and message distortions

In order for the supervisors, frontline officers and indeed any manager to fit into the complex and emerging millennium working environment, a number of skills and capacity should be acquired to make them perform at their best possible state. Some of these are enumerated below as:

- Appropriate (Basic/Technical) Education
- Continuous Education
- Computer Literacy
- Good and working knowledge of the official language
- Dynamic and creative abilities
- Knowledge of the organisation
- Excellent communication and listening skills
- Total Quality Management
- Total Leadership Management – leading by example
- Good human relations – people matter more than things
- Networking

The work of managers are better handled when reports are rendered promptly and used to facilitate quality job supervision and

better record keeping. Your relationship with top management, management, peer groups and the lower cadre staff runs smoothly because reports are established communication channels within organisations. It prevents the unpleasantness that go with verbal reports (not advisable) as it does not offer the opportunity to put your work in perspective.

Conclusion

We have been discussing communication, human relations and report writing. I do hope you have been able to see how important your job as senior executives, managers, supervisor and indeed frontline personnel is to your employer as well as the clients. You are encouraged to remember that the most important factor that holds organisations together is “relationships” and you happen to be important players in this respect. If you are honest, diligent, loyal and welcoming, there would be no limits to the height you can attain. Your job is important, put your heart and indeed your whole being in it.