

---

# The Three Things

## Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include



## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

If you are frustrated with the lack of effective communication skills in your organization, and the issues that result, you're not alone. Studies reveal that [86 percent](#) of employees and business leaders cite a lack of effective communication as the main cause for workplace failure. Regardless of industry, company, or role, mastering communication skills will enhance success for any business. Whether you help your employees deliver a compelling sales pitch, manage and coach employees, provide world-class customer service, or enhance teamwork, your communication skills training program should incorporate interactive learning strategies suited to your employees' needs.

Unfortunately, much of what passes as training is merely a transfer of knowledge. Reading and reciting facts about effective communication skills without practicing them is like reading recipes and calling oneself a chef. There is a gap in knowledge consumption and knowledge execution, and training managers who act on this distinction deliver for their learners. Proven by experience and backed by research, here are three things every communication skills program must include: video, structured skill development, and feedback.

### 1. Video

In addition to the overabundance of knowledge-oriented programs, two of the top challenges in employee training are [lack of engagement](#) and [information overload](#). By incorporating a video element into training programs, companies can solve not one, but both of these problems. Video adds an interactive visual dimension to information that might otherwise be viewed as monotonous. A recent study found that people are [95 percent](#) more likely to retain information when conveyed via video rather than text alone. With information retention numbers that high, it is essential to include this engaging component in training courses and programs.



**"A minute of video is worth 1.8 million words."**

Dr. James McQuivey  
*Forrester Research*

Additionally, [research](#) at 3M Corporation revealed that visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than text, and the brain deciphers image elements simultaneously whereas language is decoded in a linear, sequential method that takes longer to process. In fact, [90 percent](#) of information that is transmitted to the human brain is visual, and according to MIT, the brain can process an image in [13 milliseconds](#). Data show that not only does the human brain process

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

visuals more quickly than text, but it processes visuals more effectively. Research conducted by Cornell University found that scientific claims presented in only words and numbers are believed to be truthful by 68 percent of people; however, when a simple graph is presented with the claim, the number increases to 97 percent.

With the numerous statistics and research supporting the effectiveness of people's ability to process and retain visuals, it's no surprise that 83 percent of individuals prefer watching video to access instructional content. Videos have become the popular method of content consumption, and the average U.S. consumer subscribes to four different streaming video services. Even in the ever-evolving social media world, users are gravitating to short-form video platforms such as TikTok, which hit 1 billion global users in 2021.



Visuals are processed  
60,000 times faster  
than text.

90%

of information  
transmitted to the  
human brain is visual.

83%

of people prefer  
watching video to  
access instructional  
content.



The brain can process  
an image in  
13 milliseconds.

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

### What Good Looks Like

There are two important ways that you should use video in your communication skills training programs. The first is to demonstrate what “good” looks like. The interpersonal interactions in settings such as a customer service encounter, a sales meeting, or a difficult performance coaching session are all instances where learners need expert communication skills. But learners want examples of what that looks like. In the training classroom, it can be difficult to demonstrate these interactions if you only have one facilitator. This is a great opportunity to include video. You can incorporate a What Good Looks Like video and contrast it with a What Poor Looks Like. This gives learners an up-close and concrete example of an appropriate skill in action.

There are a variety of ways to incorporate these videos into your instructional design. A more traditional approach is to introduce a skill – let’s say opening a tough conversation – what communication scholars call set induction. You introduce the concept and methods used in demonstrating the skill. Then you show learners an example of what a poor opening looks like and ask them to identify what the performers did or did not do, specifically, that made the interaction unsuccessful. After a robust discussion, you can show the What Good Looks Like version and ask learners to compare the two. This type of analysis and critical thinking is a higher-order cognitive task that will challenge learners and have a better chance of making it to short-term and subsequently long-term memory.

Another approach is to play the poor interaction at the beginning of the learning module and ask participants to share their thoughts on its effectiveness. This can be a bit more challenging to facilitate, as there is often a reluctance on the part of participants to respond in the absence of knowing the context. But challenging learners to share their observations helps to generate meaningful discussion. Following the discussion, you can point out the key behaviors required for a more successful interaction. Of course, they also need to practice the skills. We’ll get to that in a moment.

### Real-Time Feedback

The second way video can also be used is as a live recording tool for real-time feedback. Feedback is critical in any type of learning, especially skill development. Video has been used for years by athletes, dancers, and other performers of physical skills. Unfortunately, we use it less in interpersonal skill development. With how widely accessible smartphones and tablets are in today’s work environment, capturing role plays and presentations can happen in real time and allow learners to watch their non-verbal behavior and listen to the dialogue or presentations in a way that would be impossible without video. So, if technology is not a barrier, what is?

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

Sometimes it's just logistics. Setting up a camera, accessing the files, playing them back – it all takes coordination and time. You need good training operations people to help make the immediate use of video recording successful.

Training managers worry about how their employees will feel when they know they are going to participate in a training session where video recording is involved. Most people say they don't want to see themselves on video. They're very self-conscious and they often complain to managers about having to engage in recorded role play. Here's where training managers need to be good advocates. They need to help learners see the value in using video – things like the accelerated rate of learning, the ability to see progress, and how a video file can be a great refresher if skills get rusty.

## 2. Structured Development Activities

Another challenge in employee training programs is ineffective training activities which result in a lack of learner motivation. If there are no challenging or engaging activities, learners fail to see the value of participating and become disengaged. Adult learning must be active in order to be effective.

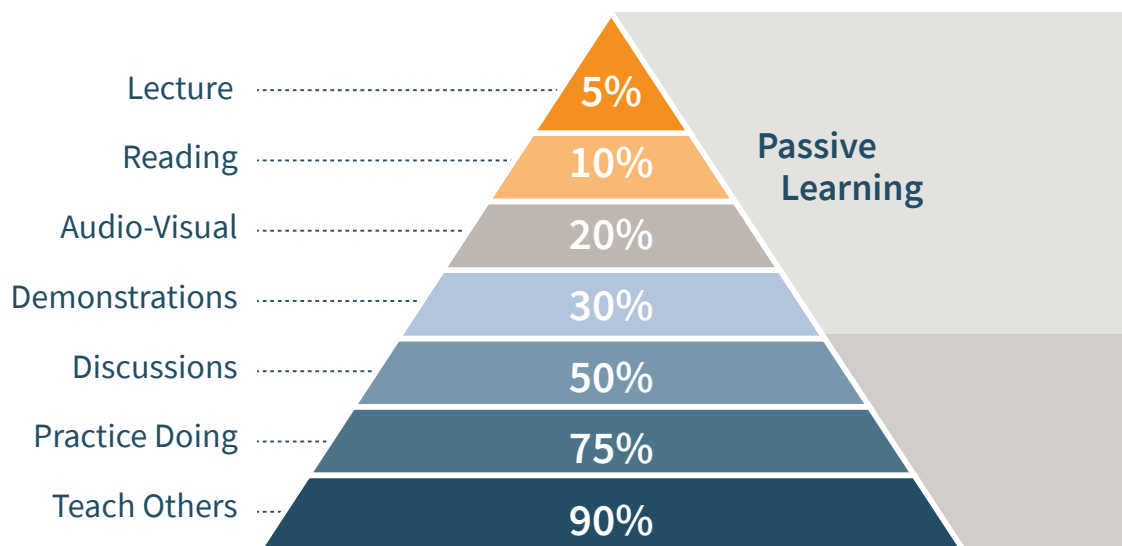


**“The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay.”**

**Henry Ford, Founder**  
*Ford Motor Company*

Essentially, active learning is exactly what it sounds like. Rather than sitting and listening to a lecture or reading course materials, active learning is any learning activity where the learner participates or interacts with the learning process rather than passively consuming the information. This type of learning can be anything from working out a math problem on a piece of paper, to role playing scenarios, to group problem solving. As long as the person is involved and playing a part in their learning experience.

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include



Source: <https://keydifferences.com/difference-between-active-and-passive-learning.html>

Role play specifically is critical for communication skills training programs. Practicing role play with other coworkers increases the level of comfort employees have when faced with real-life situations in which they need to apply professional and interpersonal skills. In addition, participating in these immersive learning experiences together builds comradery and an increased level of comfort among participants, resulting in a more positive and memorable learning experience.

Case studies also provide opportunities where learners must develop problem solving skills that are not only important in a professional environment but can be used outside of the workplace as well. These higher-order skills like analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating provide an opportunity for learners to make decisions – a critical aspect of effective communication.

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

### Benefits of role play in training programs:



**1** Ability to practice multiple skills simultaneously



**2** Gain real-time feedback and adjust behavior immediately



**3** Become more effective and comfortable with skills



**4** A focus on 'doing' rather than simply 'knowing'

When designing structured skill development activities, it's important to simulate the conditions under which a learner must demonstrate the skill. For this reason, it's critical to design training programs that reflect the actual environments and circumstances learners find themselves in. Unlike adolescent learners, adult learners bring a wealth of experience to the table, and when they are encouraged to bring that experience to the learning, it enhances relevance and provides more depth. Training activities designed to solve problems or meet job-related tasks and challenges will resonate with the learner more than lessons on topics that don't directly relate to their required tasks.

In addition to job-related learning, it's also important to incorporate effortful learning techniques in training programs. This type of learning requires attention and effort that produces greater long-term benefits and results. While some participants may balk at being asked to demonstrate a complex communication skill – like responding to a customer objection – in front of others, the practice will pay dividends when faced with a similar real world situation. Conducting structured skill development activities also provides the opportunity for the third element of effective communication skills training: feedback.

### 3. Feedback

Feedback is an imperative element in all communication skills training programs. In fact, feedback must be weaved throughout the entire process from the beginning to the end. Formative feedback is communication that occurs during the training process for the purpose of improving learning. Remember those pop quizzes? The focus of this feedback is to develop an action plan. With formative feedback, trainees are able to make real-time adjustments and learn as they go through the process. Key advantages of formative feedback include timeliness, positive reinforcement, reduced cognitive load as a result of less test taking, and reduced uncertainty as questions can be answered and problems can be solved in the moment.



**“There is no failure. Only feedback.”**

**Robert Allen**

*Author and mentor*

Feedback should be actionable. When a learner tries a new behavior, they need feedback that they can do something with, even if it's reinforcing feedback on something demonstrated well. Telling a learner “nice job” after an activity feels good, but the learner doesn't have any insight into what they did well and should continue. Feedback needs to be behaviorally specific. What specifically did the learner do that was effective? For instance, they may have used a probing question at the right time during a conversation or they may have leaned forward, made eye contact and nodded in agreement when receiving performance feedback. Good trainers know how to create a psychologically safe environment for learning, and they know how to provide specific, actionable feedback to learners.

This is even more critical when they see someone demonstrating a poor or ineffective behavior. If a learner comes out of a training class without a clear understanding of what they did that didn't work, they will likely repeat the behavior in a real world situation, thinking they are doing the right thing because they performed this way in class and weren't redirected.

Providing redirecting feedback in communication skills workshops can be challenging because learners are often dealing with topics and behaviors that are subjective and incorporate feelings – which are deeply personal. Telling a learner they didn't access the correct file is a lot easier than telling them they said something that could be interpreted as being defensive.



## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include

While incorporating feedback is critical, it needs to be done skillfully and conscientiously. The author and training expert Beverly Kaye shares an excellent phrase: use candor and care. A good trainer uses both.

But feedback isn't and shouldn't only be given by the trainer in a communication skills program. Peers should have the chance to offer feedback as well. When learners give feedback, they have an opportunity to practice pinpointing behavior – using the same behaviorally specific language that the instructor uses. This reinforces the learning.

However, there are risks associated with this practice. Some participants just aren't ready to give effective feedback. If you have a classroom where learners are working in small groups or in virtual training, when they are in breakout rooms, the facilitator can't be everywhere. So what can facilitators do? Here are a few ideas:

- Teach learners how to give good feedback.
- Demonstrate the skill of giving good feedback.
- Run a few “practice giving feedback” activities. The facilitator could ask a participant to provide feedback after a few learners demonstrate a skill, and then give the feedback giver – feedback.
- Rotate around the room or jump into as many breakout rooms as you can and listen to both the activity and the feedback.

According to the [Hackman and Oldham model](#) of work motivation, feedback is a part of the five characteristics that can enhance employee performance and motivation. It's just as true in communication skills training. As an added benefit, by using actionable feedback and positive reinforcement in employee training, companies can create an environment where open communication and feedback is welcome and becomes part of the culture. Open communication between coworkers and in manager and employee relationships is crucial to maintaining a healthy work environment. By encouraging this behavior, training professionals can contribute to building a healthy feedback culture.

## The Three Things Every Communication Skills Training Program Should Include



### People Skills are Communication Skills

In the workforce, [75 percent](#) of long-term job success depends on people skills, and people skills are communication skills. If you want to help your employees have more success, be more engaged, and provide a better level of service to your clients and customers, help them enhance their communication skills. Just make sure the programs you offer include the three elements required for all communication skills programs: video, structured skill development and feedback.