



Communication Workshops for Legal Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is a cornerstone of the legal profession, yet many legal professionals receive limited training in the broad spectrum of communication strategies necessary for success. This paper examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of communication workshops tailored to legal practitioners. These workshops address the unique verbal and nonverbal communication needs of legal professionals across various settings, including courtrooms, client meetings, and policy discussions. Key components include improving nonverbal sensitivity, bridging communication barriers, developing plain English legal drafting, and employing facilitative techniques. Drawing from case studies and interdisciplinary insights, the workshops aim to promote clarity, advocacy effectiveness, and client trust. The study highlights the impact of structured peer feedback, adaptive communication strategies, and technology integration on professional development. The initiative serves as a model for similar programs seeking to bridge the gap between legal expertise and practical communication competence.

Keywords: Legal communication, Nonverbal cues, Legal workshops, Plain English drafting, Facilitation techniques, Legal education.

INTRODUCTION

Humans communicate using verbal and nonverbal signs, such as gestures, posture, and emotional expression; however, people differ significantly in the extent to which they use and understand nonverbal communication. For example, men seem to use gestures as a form of “defensive” territory maintenance; whereas women make greater use of nonverbal techniques, such as emotional expression, as a form of openness and support. Attributions for sex differences in nonverbal communication consider both biological and social learning explanations. Sex differences in nonverbal sensitivity, both accuracy and decoding, and expression and use of nonverbal cues in both males and females were examined. Women are superior to men in the decoding of nonverbal cues. Furthermore, a trial lawyer can make use of incongruity between verbal and nonverbal communication to detect deception. If the lawyer could accurately detect the truth and lies, he/she could understand how to “get to the truth”. “Communicate!” Thus spoke a large sign at a recent speech by an eminent author at a nationally televised debate. Unfortunately, while the anxiety-ridden keyboard artist spoke, many in the audience could barely perceive such communication. Suppressed giggles and rolling eyes replaced understanding and illumination. Yet, considering the normal talents in writing, speech, and thought of this scholar, misunderstanding seemed a pity. The crux of the problem was nonverbal behavior. Body position, facial expression, intentional mannerisms, and rhythmic timing all pointed to a hostess terrified of public appearance. Like most communicators, this person was a master of verbal communication; like too many, inadequate preparation was present for effectiveness in the nonverbal channel [1, 2].

Importance of Effective Communication

Effective Communication in Advocacy and Justice Delivering effective and persuasive legal arguments remains the foundation upon which justice is delivered. The ability to communicate ideas to others is critical to understanding and building professional relationships. Effective communication is therefore about: Understanding how to tailor a message and its delivery to an audience of professional and academic advisers and interpreters. Recognising the range of skills and processes involved in effective communication (the ‘hidden curricula’), and the significance of these, Understanding how to deliver communication in both formal and informal settings. This, in turns, reflects the human rights of individuals and groups to be able to seek and secure their rights. They are, in short, about ensuring

equality of access and justice. Communication is central to the success of human beings and organizations. The ability to effectively communicate at work, home and in life is one of the most important sets of skills a person needs. Effective communication has become a life skill. It is the most important source of personal power at work, family and social situations. All relationships and discussions stem from communication. Communication is the process of understanding and being understood through ideas, facts, thoughts and emotions. Good communication is determined not by how well we say things but by how well we have been understood. Communication is a process by which a message is conveyed to someone or a group of people. If the message is conveyed clearly and unambiguously and is received by the receiver in the same way as intended by the sender, then it is communication. Communication becomes successful only if the receiver understands what the sender is trying to convey. The feedback received by the sender from the receiver allows the sender to determine how the message was interpreted. An effective communicator anticipates the unlimited ways a message can be understood or misunderstood. The communicator must not only take care of his/her message but also has to keep his/her audience's background in mind. Only then can the communication goal be achieved [3, 4].

Types of Communication in Legal Settings

Legal settings distinctly feature a wide array of unique communication styles, each showcasing varying approaches for events, as well as cultivating distinct identities during interactions. While courts undeniably stand out as the most recognized venues for legal communication, it is crucial to acknowledge that legal communication also occurs in many other environments, including meetings, negotiations, advising sessions, policy discussions, and a multitude of other non-court venues. Each of these distinctive settings serves specific and often nuanced communication objectives, all of which are heavily influenced by the various identities of the participants involved. Numerous factors—such as context, probative analysis, interoperability, and understandability—play an integral role in the comprehensive study of legal communication. A thorough analysis of the different modes employed, including allowances, pre-text measures, recommendations, and testimony, effectively highlights prevalent assumptions surrounding the communicative rights of legal persons. Moreover, both experienced participants and novices alike are characterized by these significant dimensions, pointing to a shared experience in the legal realm. Generally speaking, communication rights within legal settings suffer from a limited understanding, which often leads to misconceptions. In contrast, questioning is consistently encouraged among participants, indicating that there is a less strict operational framework in place regarding roles within the interaction. These compelling findings contribute to a more systematic comparison of legal communications as distinct events. Furthermore, legal communication is observed to display a range of consistent features that are present across various contexts, settings, and even regional differences, which ultimately points to predictable activities arising within this field. Such consistent affinities serve to guide ongoing research by suggesting potential projects, defining specific contexts, and outlining examination options for the comprehensive study of legal communication. The valuable insights drawn from the minutiae of courtroom procedures regarding language, cognition, and social dynamics have not only informed current understandings but also spurred further explorations into a variety of communication events and their intricate workings within the legal framework [5, 6].

Barriers To Effective Communication

People often really want to express themselves clearly and get their points across, but face challenges in getting it right. Effective interpersonal communication involves both verbal (words we say) and nonverbal (gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and actions) communication. Unfortunately, barriers to effective communication based on personal attitudes or habits can prevent people from living up to their good intentions. A few of the more common barriers are examined below, along with suggestions on how to overcome them. A gap in background and experience can cause misunderstandings. Each person is different and has had experiences that give him or her a unique way of looking at the world. Age can affect how someone sees things. For example, an older person who remembers having been “kept in the dark” as a child may be sinning against himself in getting impatient with a teen who isn’t “getting the point” he thinks he is communicating. A seasoned world traveler may have trouble knowing how much to explain to a person from a remote part of the country who just learned how to fly. Similarly, experienced legal professionals have ways of talking and thinking that may make complete sense to them, but can confuse a layman. A gap in health and physical condition can also contribute to misunderstandings. A person’s health may prevent him from thinking clearly, listening carefully, or speaking well. For example, during a stressful time, a person who normally thinks very clearly may become somewhat muddled in thought and speech for a day or so. A hearing-impaired adjuster who has not yet gotten used to a hearing aid may have difficulty paying attention to what is said, and “go blank” or

speak disjointedly by following the “feel” of what people are talking about without hearing the words. Careful listening, especially for nonverbal cues, can make a great difference. Frequently, a little summary of what is said can do wonders in helping a person recover track [7, 8].

Communication Skills Development

The workshops aim to enhance communication skills for employees in legal, regulatory, and policy roles, tailored to specific audiences with participants having basic English writing skills. "Communicating Through Writing and Beyond" focuses on audience-centered legal communication, emphasizing the importance of presenting a positive impression, sound, and tone in various formats like printouts, presentations, emails, and comments. This introductory workshop covers the fundamentals of plain English writing and the proper use of legal terminology. Following this, the "Legal Drafting in Plain English" workshop, requiring a review of best practices beforehand, delves into effectively using plain English in legal documentation. Participants learn to adjust awkward phrases in legalese and minimize misunderstandings tied to common terms. Clear written communication is critical in business, transforming legal policies and products into accessible legal documentation that preserves an expert's reasoning and thought process. However, excessive legal jargon can alienate those outside the legal field. The challenge lies in simplifying legalese into plain English without compromising confidentiality or key details [9, 10].

Workshops Overview

These workshops will involve legal professionals from the greater Chicago area meeting to discuss communication issues unique to their practice. Panelists will be chosen from prominent Chicago-area lawyers, judges, and law professors, who will lead discussions. The workshops will offer practical advice on dealing with common problems, along with the opportunity to network with other legal professionals. For many lawyers, oral communication is no longer the “sole-client” issue. Thus, each panel will consist of a practicing lawyer, former practicing lawyer/judge, and law professor on an issue unique to the legal profession. Some of the preliminary discussion topics include using facilitative tactics in depositions, effective cross-examination, directing/judging mock trials, breaking down silos through active listening in law firms, and the power of nonverbal communication in interactions with clients, opposing counsel, and judges. Workshops will entail a panel discussion followed by open audience discussion. Each workshop will last 90 minutes to two hours. A list of practicing lawyers and judges who were guests in courses throughout the past four years will be compiled. This list will also be supplemented with suggestions for subjects and names from colleagues at nearby institutions. Initial contact will be made via phone or email. Panelists will be asked to choose their one main point and provide any materials they would like ahead of time, with the goal of encouraging discussion among attorneys who have experience in this area. The first workshop will tentatively be focused on facilitating tactics in depositions. Marketing will entail a letter to a blended list of private and government law firms. It will explain the tone and purpose of the workshops, provide a summary of the agenda items, and include a hopeful emphasis that panelists are lawyers in the area who understand the circumstances of practitioners. It will try to reach the managing partners in larger firms and the heads of divisions/departments in smaller firms, with the expectation that they will share the letter with anyone who may be interested [11, 12].

Designing Effective Workshops

Workshop format questions parallel school learning format questions: What will the participants' role be? What will the workshop leader's role be? What activities will participants do? How will the leader communicate? When will this take place? What resources will be used? There are no simple answers, but listing outcomes for each workshop aids in planning. Learning in a workshop should be participatory and relevant to participants' experiences, achieved through various modes of communication, including 2-2.5 hour blocks; ice-breaking events; lunch and breaks shared with colleagues; audio-visual programs and outside speakers; and demonstrations of innovative practices. One method for setting agendas is "Groupware," which utilizes a matrix of "affinity clusters" by topic and participant expertise. Participants choose discussion topics and chairs, and each carries a color code denoting their experience. Groups present selected items with designated spokespersons. Another method is the open forum, reconvening for evaluation and discussion after smaller sessions. Session leaders often determine the "bottom line" for breakout sessions to enhance the meeting's effectiveness. Chronicling interesting resolutions adds drama, while summarizing less spectacular resolutions encourages leaders' engagement in discussions [13, 14].

Facilitation Techniques

Oral communication skills are an important means of promoting both daily and overall discipline efficiency. The purpose of this text is to provide information regarding communication workshops that were implemented in partnership between the Office of Faculty Development and the Law Clinic and Pro

Bono Program at an American Association of Law Schools-accredited law school. The workshops created opportunities for law faculty and clinicians to reflect upon and refine their existing communication skills through feedback from peers, the professor conducting the workshop, and a practicing attorney. The workshops also provided a low-risk environment for law faculty and clinicians to practice newly-developed or less-used communication techniques. This text will provide insight regarding two core skills addressed in the workshops conducted in 2015-2016: organization and style, with a focus on facilitation techniques. Recognizing when and how to use a structured discussion technique without taking control is key to using the skill of facilitation effectively. It is not necessary to have a highly structured agenda; general titles with no additional details often work well. A polite but unequivocal request for time and manner of comments will generally produce a decision by the group at least as useful as one produced by the facilitator herself. If ground rules don't surface after an exhausting discussion, they probably don't need to. Some of the most successful structures were the simplest. Whatever the technique chosen, it should aim to use participants' time effectively. A good technique will assure every participant that their input is valid and welcome, and will address at least some communication weaknesses [15, 16].

Case Studies of Successful Workshops

A legal writing and communication instructor engaged in the less common business of teaching plays, poetry, and fiction to lawyers and law students. Despite training in communication, she found it difficult to design a practical curriculum for lawyers and law students who were already thought to be effective communicators. Seeking to stimulate thoughts and inspire people for writing creatively, she developed two exercises over a three-month period. Presenting them at a Bar Association meeting eased her angst and convinced her that others might have the same need. Perceiving the excitement of the lawyers in a writing workshop was confirmation of the need, and the lawyers were excited because what they had done was different. Business members of a lawyer group were approached to sponsor a similar experience. Their initial thought was defense-side work productivity. Three hours spent on the productivity aspect of communication led participants to request a follow-up session on communication philosophy. This deeper study led to further requests for communication workshops in Kansas City; Philadelphia; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Atlanta. A two-hour communication workshop at the Kentucky Bar Convention focused on speech delivery. Banquet comments drew enthusiastic feedback, and after the session, a call brought a requested communication workshop for the five-member executive committee of a law firm in Kentucky. Although not many ideas had been developed, participation in a similar workshop had instilled great confidence. A panel discussion was organized, and response to a few questions broadened yet constrained the focus. The senior partner's remark on the "presentation," the topic of pedagogy, amused everyone and amused those who had imagined a business-oriented panel on presentations [17, 18].

Technology In Communication Workshops

We live in an age where technological innovation is paramount, yet discomfort with technology isn't exclusive to legal professionals or older generations. People worldwide strive to keep up with new devices, technologies, and social media, leading to an influx of "how-to articles" and cautionary tales about technology misuse. Despite this, formal education on new technologies is scarce, leaving a vague understanding of social ethics in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Legal professionals face the dual ethical responsibilities of upholding the law and comprehending how technology shapes client communication, which can feel overwhelming. Addressing information asymmetries can enhance advisory practices in light of evolving technologies and client needs. Significant time is typically necessary to gain comfort with new technology, and lawyers must discern whether to adopt different technologies as clients request them to improve their services. Attorneys often find themselves in challenging situations involving unfamiliar public devices or new technology adoption, requiring thoughtful responses without violating legal rules or diminishing communication quality. Many standard practices lack clear explanations for their adherence, and new issues arise, like dealing with clients who refuse secure communication options or use insecure channels. Particularly concerning is the potential gap in lawyers' understanding of clients' technologies. The legal field is dynamic and must confront its shortcomings while promoting dialogue about education, understanding, and the relevance of technology beyond self-interest [19, 20].

Future Trends in Legal Communication

Though there will be no "one size fits all" solutions, these workshops allow lawyers to assess their communications, a critical core competency. This self-assessment leads to personal insights, action steps, and the motivation to strengthen communications skill sets—individually and collectively. There is a myriad of diverse formats, styles and skills that lawyers can master to strengthen their communications acumen. Whether on a panel, as an interview subject, or giving a speech, lawyers need to be themselves,

be current, and be prepared when communicating—regardless of the situation or context. Everyone can and should commit to communications preparation and training for themselves, their lawyers, and their firms—before, during and after crisis situations. This is the most secure way to enhance communications sophistication, comfort, and confidence. These presentations can yield immediately usable tips to augment the communications training received in Law School, as well as prepare lawyers anticipating a future in-house counsel position. Beyond comfort and confidence, lawyers train and prepare better communications to do a better job for their clients—solving problems, building reputations, enhancing brand value, and earning return on investment. Failure to communicate better incurs risks that empower ignorance, group think, indecision, and inaction—and exacts costs from clients, colleagues, firms, and the profession at large. Some firms' recognition that—out of reach for many individuals, firms, and bar professions—plain legal English is an essential difference maker creates doors for lawyers able to communicate better. The first step for improving communications begins with a written examination of a lawyer's work product—one that is then complemented with input. Every attorney's written work product covers a wide range, from text messages to motions. What exactly comprises better communications will differ depending on the subject matter and purpose. There is no "Queen for a Day" invitation or immunity for disclosures [21, 22].

Ethics Of Communication in Law

Lawyering basics are taught in law schools, including legal analysis and logic, effective communication, and ethics. One area of communication, however, has been largely untouched: how the lawyer's decision to use technology to communicate with the client is subject to the ethical duties of confidentiality, competence, and communication, precluding or altering the use of the most common, popular and convenient modes of communication. The client whose identity is disclosed as a result of email may lose the right of confidentiality as to her identity and the trust that may have been a condition precedent to discussing all matters with the attorney. The risk of subjective bias via the new media device plays a larger role in determining whether to press "send," and may affect the wording of the communication. Legal professionals should be taught that the lawyer's duties of confidentiality, competence, and communication sometimes preclude or alter the decision to communicate electronically, regardless of who "writes" the email or presses "send." Law students and new lawyers should appreciate the significance of the decision to use technology for this purpose. Professors should include specific reference to the relevant provisions of the ethical rules and ethics opinions in instruction and mentoring. Instruction and mentoring should also focus on the ethical issues raised in the ethics committee opinions and other related concerns, a more difficult task, but one that will produce better lawyers, more ready to understand what wrong lawyers in cases like Wallis. It will make students better lawyers who are better prepared to discharge their duties early in practice, for example, with regard to the decision whether and if so how to respond to the ethical breach of the former attorney who used email to communicate with the lawyer after receipt of the notice of appearance and, to use email to communicate with the former client [23, 24].

CONCLUSION

Communication workshops offer a transformative opportunity for legal professionals to refine their verbal and nonverbal communication skills. By focusing on tailored, interactive formats and real-world applications, these programs bridge crucial gaps between legal expertise and effective advocacy. The consistent feedback from participants across multiple locations confirms the growing demand for such initiatives. Furthermore, incorporating facilitation methods, practical exercises, and technological adaptability ensures the relevance and impact of these workshops. Legal professionals equipped with these enhanced communication tools are better prepared to represent their clients, foster professional relationships, and navigate the evolving demands of the legal landscape. Future initiatives should prioritize sustained engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and further research on long-term outcomes to ensure that communication training remains a central pillar of legal practice.

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CITE AS: Kakungulu Samuel J. (2025). Communication Workshops for Legal Professionals. RESEARCH INVENTION JOURNAL OF LAW, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGES 5(1):36-42. <https://doi.org/10.59298/RIJLCL/2025/513642>