



SUCCESSFUL CUEING: THE EFFECTS OF WORD CHOICE

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Effective and positive oral communication skills will guide us through life with self-confidence as well as promote feelings of accomplishment. We already possess all of the communication skills needed to get through life, but do we have the best communication skills to succeed at the best of our ability both professionally and personally?

A strong communicator will analyze each aspect of oral communication, deciding which part will best serve the message they are trying to convey in that particular interaction. But improving your communication skills, particularly word choice, takes conscious practice and dedication to slow down and think about your selections. This will inevitably effect the possible outcome these words will have on your client's understanding and experience with a particular Pilates exercise or session, and most definitely with how they perceive Pilates as a whole.

Why must we have effective communication with our clients?

Workshop Objectives

1. Define a variety of concepts pertaining to oral communication

2. Highlight the nuances that go into word choice and the role they play in successful communication
3. Engage Pilates professionals to think about their own perceptions when it comes to verbal communication
4. Encourage Pilates professionals to become more aware and sensitive to the words they choose in their cueing
5. Empower Pilates professionals to actively practice and implement careful and thoughtful word selection by providing a fundamental knowledge of oral communication concepts
6. Give Pilates professionals a variety of tools that will guide them in making the strongest and most appropriate word choices for the optimal communication with their clients

The Different Ways That We Communicate

Intrapersonal Communication. As Pilates professionals we think, rehearse, strategize, reflect and critique our experiences, interactions, choices, sessions, classes and business of being a Pilates teacher. This intrapersonal communication has an inevitable outcome on our success as an effective teacher and communicator with our clients.

Interpersonal Communication. Interpersonal communication takes place when we communicate with another person. As Pilates professionals, we engage in interpersonal communications in two ways:

1. Private, one-on-one sessions.
2. Small group or large group sessions. There are both advantages and disadvantages to interpersonal communication in a group setting
 - The advantage of small group communication in the Pilates setting is the group often has similar goals and like-mindedness, which contributes to solidarity and ultimately an effective communication interaction.
 - The disadvantage of small group communication is that each member comes from a unique background and has a unique individual nature, which may limit the effectiveness of certain messages, particularly when it comes to word choices.

The Communication Process

There is a specific communication process that we go through every time we have an interaction with others (Young & Travis, 2008). We go through the process subconsciously, often unaware of the communication mistakes we are making and how we can make subtle corrections that will make us more effective and clear communicators.

The key to successful teaching and communication with your client is to become more conscious of the communication process that involves six elements.

1. Communicators

Teachers and clients are both communicators during a Pilates session, constantly sending and receiving both verbal and nonverbal messages. Our role as communicators is an undeniable and vital part of navigating life successfully.

2. Messages

As communicators we send verbal and nonverbal messages, and our messages begin when we formulate the thought in our mind. There is a detailed process that occurs:

1. As the delivering communicator, we **encode** our thoughts into words or actions by thinking about and choosing the best representation for what we mean.
2. We analyze the best communicative route or **channel** and then we relay our message
3. Once the message is delivered to the receiver, they **decode** our words or actions by thinking about them, applying meaning to them and ultimately transferring them to thought.

Our verbal messages are greatly affected by way that we use our voice, or the vocal component of our speech. This is called **paralanguage** and it includes the following (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 2009):

1. **Articulation.** The degree of articulation or clarity in which words are enunciated (i.e. - pronounced syllables or slurred sounds) play a role in successful communication.
2. **Rhythm.** When we speak we emphasize certain words in a sentence, altering the meaning that is conveyed or perceived by the receiver.
3. **Volume.** Speaking loudly or quietly has many different associations and sends many different messages to the receiver.

- Loud volume can imply confidence, enthusiasm or emphasis, or it may convey an exaggeration, aggressiveness or over confidence. A soft volume may imply intimacy, care, comfort, understanding or trust, or it may convey insecurity, unimportance or inferiority.

When somebody speaks loudly, how does it make you feel? What impression of that person does it give you?

When somebody speaks softly, how does it make you feel? What impression of that person does it give you?

4. **Pitch/Tone.** Raising the pitch of our voice (when vocal cords tighten) can imply strong feelings of joy, fear, nervousness or annoyance. When the pitch of our voice goes down (when vocal cords relax) it can imply fatigue, calm or sadness.

5. **Rate/Tempo.** The speed at which words are spoken can reflect and reveal emotions which can have an affect on the way the receiver decodes our words, depending on the receivers perceptions.

- Speaking fast may imply persuasiveness, excitement or importance, or it may convey nervousness or insecurity. Speaking slowly may imply indifference or unpreparedness, or it may convey interest or thoughtfulness.

When somebody speaks quickly and rapidly, how does it make you feel? What impression of that person does it give you?

When somebody speaks slowly, how does it make you feel? What impression of that person does it give you?

Paralanguage plays a significant role in the success of our word choices when communicating our messages to our clients. Consider the following when being mindful of your paralanguage:

1. Is your intention as well as the meaning of the words you are saying reflected in your voice?
2. Are your voice and the words you speak working synergistically to make your point and to clarify your message?

KEY POINT: As communicators it is crucial that we encode our thoughts with care, sensitivity and effectiveness, because when we do, it is more likely that the receiver will decode our message correctly. This is often where miscommunication happens in the form of misunderstanding of intentions or initial meanings of messages.

5. Channel

Messages go through a particular channel in order to best relate to and effectively transfer to the intended receiver. Examples of different channels are face-to-face interactions, email, text messages, books, television, phone call, letters, etc.

In the context of teaching Pilates, the channel is most commonly face-to-face interaction (including verbal, tactile, and visual channels) but Pilates is always communicated through DVDs, audio recordings, books and online through wonderful services like Pilates Anytime (wink, wink).

6. Circumstances

Circumstances include both the context of the situation and the personal, fundamental nature of the involved communicators. These will both contribute to the unique outcome of a particular interaction, including successful encoding, channeling and decoding.

Context of the situation refers to what is appropriate in:

1. Individual versus group settings
2. Professional versus personal settings

3. Formal versus informal settings

Circumstances include an individual's:

1. Background and experiences
2. Values
3. Beliefs
4. Attitude

KEY POINT: Learning about and being aware of the circumstances involved in the communication with a particular client will aid in the proper encoding of your intended message.

7. Feedback

When we communicate there is constant feedback being transferred back and forth between the communicators.

Verbal and nonverbal feedback reveals to the communicator whether or not their intended message was received.

What is an example of verbal feedback that you may receive from your client?

What is an example of nonverbal feedback that you may receive from your client?

8. Noise

Noise is defined particular situations and circumstances that can thwart the successful encoding, receiving and decoding of an intended message communicators are trying to convey. Examples of noise, according to Young and Travis (2008), include:

1. **Physical noise.** This includes any environmental noise that could be disrupting the communication interaction. This includes but is certainly not limited to loud music, construction noises, surrounding conversations etc.

2. **Personal noise.** This includes the influence of the communicator’s individual circumstances, experiences and fundamental nature that could distract them from relaying or receiving an intended message. According to Young and Travis, prejudice, close-mindedness, insecurity and self-centered noise all contribute to personal noise.

3. **Semantic noise.** This refers to situations where technical jargon, emotionally charged words or a different language distracts effective communication.

What are three examples of each type of noise in the Pilates setting and how can they disrupt effective communication?

Physical noise

Personal noise

Semantic noise

What’s In A Word?

Words are one example of symbols we use to communicate with our clients. As Pilates professionals, the clearer we are in our encoding of symbols the greater chance our clients will understand our meaning. Symbols, in this case words, are both of the following:

1. **Arbitrary.** Words do not always have a universal meaning. There is no innate connection between the word we choose and the objects or thoughts they are meant to represent.

2. **Ambiguous.** Words can hold different meanings for different individuals according to their personal perceptions and backgrounds.

KEY POINT: It is important to remember that when selecting words the meanings are in people, not in the words.

Answer the questions pertaining to the words in the following Pilates cues?

“Sit up like a tall building” How tall is that building?

“Imagine that you are wearing a pair of high shoes” What type of shoes are they? How high are they?

The challenge in successful word choices truly boils down to the specific feeling, meaning and experiences your client associates with that word or words. Effective meaning relies on a mutual understanding of symbols (words).

Every word has a two types of meanings:

1. **Denotative meaning.** This is the dictionary definition of a word.
2. **Connotative meaning.** This includes the attached feelings and emotions that people link to that word.

KEY POINT: Connotative meaning is very important and crucial in effective communication because the number of connotative meanings for each word is great and varies among individuals, it can be challenging to avoid misunderstanding.

Write down the denotative meaning for the word “drop”

Write one example each of a positive and negative connotative meaning for the same word

Choose a word that you often use in your cueing and write both the denotative and possible connotative meanings

A **metamessage** relates to the connotative meaning of a word or words, reflecting the speaker's feelings and attitudes based on their paralanguage (pitch, rhythm, etc) and verbal modifiers (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 2009).

The words we emphasize with paralanguage or add (verbal modifiers) play a large role in what is really being communicated through our words, which may cause conflict and miscommunication or happiness and approval. We need to pay attention to what the metamessage is communicating as well as the verbal words we choose.

Rhythm and pitch can effect the chosen words in a message by subtly but effectively altering the encoding and decoding of those words. The particular emphasize we give to words can convey differing messages.

When looking at the following, common Pilates cue, "Relax your shoulders" what do you think is implied when the word "relax" is emphasized?

What do you think is implied when the word "your" is emphasized?

Choose another common Pilates cue and compare the metamessages when two different words are emphasized.

Verbal modifiers are specific words or short phrases that are added to a message that contribute meaning to what is really being said. Examples commonly used are "only," "sure," "still," "slightly," "just," "of course," "I'm sure," "come on," etc.

What is implied by the verbal modifier that is added to this statement, “*Now, you got it!*”?

What is implied by the verbal modifiers that are added to these statements, “*Come on, five more repetitions!*” or “*Just five more repetitions!*”

Language has a powerful influence over how we think about situations, ourselves, others and the world around us.

Words and the way we say them can hold different meanings to the different individuals/clients we encounter every day. Some words may induce a negative, offensive reaction, a positive, encouraging reaction, or no reaction at all.

KEY POINT: It is crucial that we understand that we may not be able to use the same words for every client in every situation.

Proper word selection can be tough to navigate. To help with this challenge a concept called, **rhetorical sensitivity**, which was coined by Roderick Hart and Don Burks in 1972, can help make the navigation of communication waters less taunting and successful.

Rhetorical sensitivity is when the communicator reviews as many of the available words to convey their message with the appropriate emotional meaning, the least potentially offensive and most productive word for the receiver.

Loaded words are those with a host of positive or negative connotative meanings along with its denotative meaning. Generally unaware and without malintent, we use loaded words in our daily personal and professional communication.

When using the following different words to describe when a client is “out of alignment”, which ones hold more positive, productive meanings and which one hold negative meanings?

crooked	askew	lopsided
imbalanced	distorted	out of line
uneven	off-centered	
off	cockeyed	

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Perception

Perception plays a major role in how we interpret symbols like words. Every individual perceives events, behaviors and interactions differently because we all have different expectations, experiences and thoughts.

Perception is the tool we use to assess, select and determine importance, interest and value from external stimuli (sounds, sights, smells, etc).

KEY POINT: Because our individual circumstances and history play such an important role in our perception, as well as in our decoding and encoding of words, we often compare new messages with past experiences and thoughts of similar situations.

Think of a time when you heard something, a story, a description, a word or a thought, that instantly made you remember, compare it to or relate to a past experience, thought or sensation that you had.

To avoid being so overwhelmed from the abundance of external stimuli around us, and the energy it requires to process it, we simply do not acknowledge one. There is a **perceptual process** that occurs (McGaan, 2003):

1. **Selection.** Selection occurs when your mind decides what stimuli and messages to focus on and which to ignore or dismiss.

2. **Organization.** Organization occurs when stimuli, experiences or messages are grouped in a way that is meaningful to us. We organize messages by relating and comparing them to past experiences before we decide what the current message means. Organization in this way has the potential to limit us from perceiving messages and new experiences properly, limiting our willingness to take in new information.

3. **Interpretation.** Interpretation occurs when we create and apply meaning to what we decided to hear, see, etc and how we organize it in our mind.

Upon hearing the following Pilates verbal cues, write down your perception according the perceptual process:

1. Raise your arms by floating them up slowly, stopping when your hands are over your shoulders, creating a straight, strong line.

Selection

Organization

Interpretation

2. As you lift one leg off the mat, hinge from the hip maintaining the 90 degree angle at the knee, stabilizing with the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to avoid instability and vulnerability of your lower back.

Selection

Organization

Interpretation

Preparing Your Words

The goal in successful cueing and communication with clients is to deliver a whole message by choosing clear words that are encoded, channeled and decoded in a way that helps them best perceive and understand the intentions of the message (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 2009).

1. Self-Awareness

As the teacher, being aware of your own perceptions, feelings and experiences will have a significant effect on the efficacy of your message/s. The following are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What do I really want to communicate?
- Can I find a way to say what I am feeling and observing? Do my words reflect what I am trying to communicate?
- What is the purpose of my communication, what am I trying to achieve?
- Can I differentiate between what I observe and know from what I assume and believe?
- Can I express my message in a productive, encouraging, informational yet non-threatening way?

You have a new client that stops frequently to ask very direct questions during your sessions, what do you:

Observe

Feel

Want to communicate with them

2. Awareness of your client

Practicing sensitivity, respect and awareness are vital when teaching and communicating with your clients. Awareness of their mood, energy level, focus, verbal feedback, body language, facial expressions and execution of the exercises will give you immediate and valuable information from which you can make the best word choices for successful communication.

When a client rushes into the studio, barely says hello, proceeds to perform the exercises in a rushed, sloppy manner, and glances regularly at the clock, what do you:

Observe

Feel

Want to communicate with them

3. Environmental awareness

Awareness of your environment and the effect it may be having on your communication with your client plays a role in the success of your cueing and the messages you and your client are both trying to convey.

Teaching Pilates is a very intimate experience for both the teacher and the client, requiring focus and awareness. The right environment will set the stage from which your messages can be communicated wholly and clearly without overwhelming distractions or interruptions that may alter the encoding, channeling and decoding of messages. You want to be in an environment that allows for:

- Some privacy
- Comfort, relaxation and focus
- Minimal distractions

4. Word Awareness

In order to best prepare our words to create effective and successful cues, we need to not only be cognizant of what words may mean or imply to certain individuals, we need to have awareness and knowledge of our various word options and choices. Having the awareness of a variety of words will help us make the best choices based on:

- What we as professionals observe and what we need to communicate; corrections, encouragement, quality, direction, clarification, safety, etc
- What we as professionals feel
- The mood, energy, receptiveness, personality and goals of the client/s
- The atmosphere and environment
- The teacher/client relationship

Provide 5 other word choices that relate to the following words.

1. Press

Which words would you choose for a client that is frazzled and tense after a bad day at work?

2. Stabilize

Which words would you choose for a new client that is hypermobile and insecure with her body?

3. Rotate

Which words would you choose with small group of women that are jovial, chatty and easily distracted?

Read the following scenario.

You have a male client that is taking Pilates because he wants to “loosen up”, release overall **body stiffness** and manage **stress**. He’s an entrepreneur that has started a new small business and is working tirelessly make it a success. While observing your client perform the Hundred Prep, you notice that in the set up position his arms are very **wide** with the elbows **bent** and his legs are slightly **separated** when they are up in tabletop position. As he goes into the **spinal flexion** he attempts to lift his shoulders, head and neck in one piece toward the ceiling, almost keeping a **straight line** in his upper spine, and his arms are **bent** at the elbows and **away** from his body as they move forward toward the legs. You also notice that as he moves he **barely breathes** with a minimum exhale, and that he is holding **tension** in his throat and jaw.

Write a set of cues for the exercise described in the above scenario (focus on the bold words) carefully choosing your words based on what you want to communicate from your observation of the movement (quality, execution, integrity, correctness) as well as the client's energy.

What do you want to communicate to your client?

What words do you want to focus on in your communication with your client? (narrow, straight, flexion, etc.) Write down several choices for each word you want to emphasize.

Write out a cue you would use with this client to successfully communicate with him what you've observed, what needs to be corrected and the quality of the movement that will best serve his needs and goals.

Communication with our clients is a complex and detailed process, and at the heart of it is intelligent and thoughtful word choice. Word choices will determine the success of our intended messages as teachers. But more importantly, good word choices will determine the success of our client's interpretation, understanding and reaction to our cues - ultimately influencing their experience and success with practicing Pilates.

THANK YOU!

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