Introduction to Business Communication and Character

Learning Objectives

After you have finished this chapter, you should be able to

LO1   Describe the relationship between communication and character.

LO2   Explain components of the character, audience, message (CAM) communication model.

LO3   Identify factors to consider during the character check step of the communication model.

LO4   Describe aspects of the audience to consider in business communication.

LO5   Choose the best medium for your message in a business situation.

The Learning Objectives (LOs) will help you learn the material. You'll see references to the LOs throughout the chapter.

> " *I Started Trading Hot Stocks on Robinhood. Then I Couldn't Stop.* " [1]

—Jason Sweig, author of *Your Money and Your Brain*

Chapter Introduction

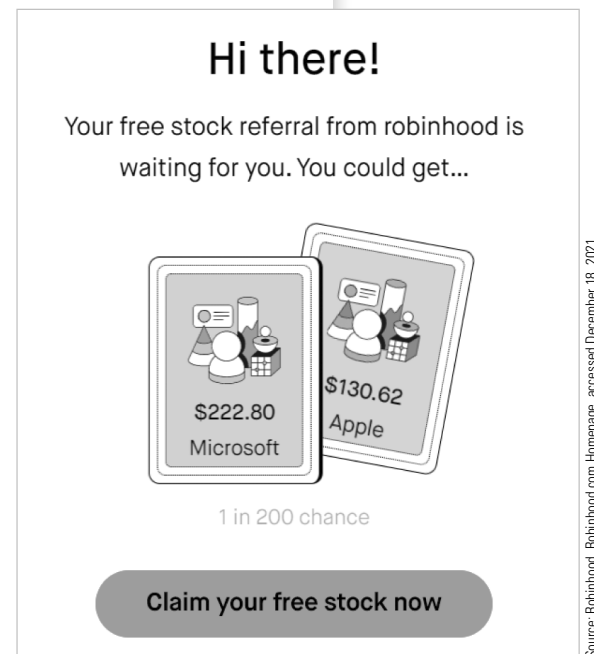# Robinhood Is Fined $65 Million for Misleading Communications

Investment app Robinhood agreed to pay $65 million in fines for misleading customers. The start-up grew rapidly, attracting younger, inexperienced investors with no-fee accounts, zero minimums, and unlimited trading.[2] Redditors using Robinhood and other apps rocked the market in 2021 when they drove up GameStop, AMC, BlackBerry, and other stocks, causing wild price fluctuations with no connection to company performance.[3]

A lawsuit against Robinhood cited "aggressive tactics" and "gamification"[4] to push users to invest in riskier stocks, resulting in higher trading volume, potentially dramatic losses, and more revenue for the company. A competitor compared using the app to "being in Las Vegas,"[5] and an NBC article describes the persuasive visuals:

> When smartphone owners pull up Robinhood's investment app, they're greeted with a variety of dazzling touches: bursts of confetti to celebrate transactions, the price of bitcoin in neon pink, and a list of popular stocks to trade.
>
> Charles Schwab, meet Candy Crush.[6]

All is well when stocks go up, but when stocks decline, users must make up the loss. For one 20-year-old man, his bill appeared to be $730,000, and he committed suicide.[7] Robinhood's business model and communication raise questions about the leaders' character.

To gamify investing, Robinhood shows playing cards and chances to win.

Source: Robinhood, Robinhood.com Homepage, accessed December 18, 2021.

CHARACTER

Visit the author's blog at amynewman.com for current communication examples.

1-1 Business Communication and Character

Your communication demonstrates who you are as a person—what is considered your **character**. Your messages and delivery reflect on you personally, communicating not only your ideas but also what you value and how you care to engage with those around you.

You might think of character as a fixed trait, but character is a simple habit that is developed over time. Every day, you make critical choices about whether, how, when, and what to communicate. When you make decisions that have positive outcomes for others and for yourself in the long term, you are choosing to be a person of high character. Over time, you develop "moral muscle memory"[8] and more regularly and more easily make better decisions.
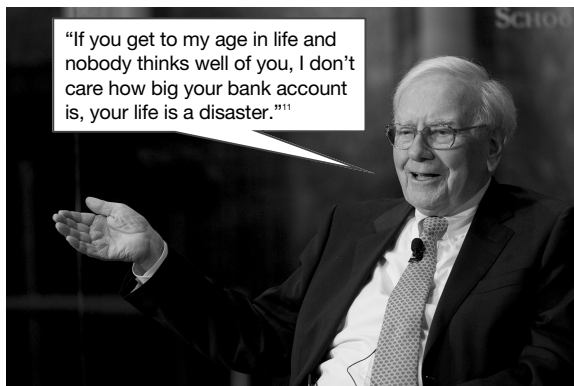
Character and communication are inextricable. Communication sends signals to others about your character—strong or weak. Based on your communication, others decide whether they will respect you, listen to you, and choose to work with you. Fortunately, we can choose to develop our character and illustrate strong character in our communication.

1-1a The Value of Proficient Communication Skills

As a result of your work in this course, with this book and your instructor as your guides, you will develop proficient communication skills that employers value. Written, oral, and interpersonal communication as well as leadership and teamwork skills rank highly on lists of skills that employers seek in new hires.[9]

Your communication differentiates you during the job search and on the job. Competence in writing and speaking helps you get hired, perform well, and earn promotions. If you decide to go into business for yourself, communication skills help you find investors, promote your product, and manage your employees. These same skills also help you in your personal life with family, friends, partners, and community members.

In most jobs, people communicate more than they do any other activity. **Communication** is the process of sending and receiving messages—sometimes **verbally** through spoken or written words and sometimes **nonverbally** through facial expressions, gestures, postures, and voice qualities. If you send a message to someone and they receive it, communication will have taken place. At work, you communicate by writing emails, attending meetings, producing reports, posting online, conducting interviews, blogging, delivering presentations, and more. You also communicate with your silence and lack of response.

"If you get to my age in life and nobody thinks well of you, I don't care how big your bank account is, your life is a disaster."[11]

Chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Warren Buffett speaks of character in his own life.

Drew Angerer/Getty Images

CHARACTER

1-1b Demonstrating Character Through Communication

Good communication demonstrates that you're a person—and a leader—of good character who makes a positive impact on others over time. In Figure 1, you'll see examples of character dimensions that we'll revisit throughout the book.

Multinational conglomerate holding company Berkshire Hathaway hires for character. Chairman and CEO Warren Buffett, also known for his philanthropy, describes three qualities the company looks for in new employees: intelligence, initiative (or energy), and integrity. He explains, "And if they don't have the latter, the first two will kill you. Because if you're going to get someone without integrity, you want him lazy and dumb."[10]

CHARACTER DIMENSION	DEFINITION	COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES
Accountability	Taking responsibility	Admitting a mistake and taking steps to solve problems caused
Authenticity	Living as your genuine self	Acting naturally during a job interview
Compassion	Caring for others and for yourself	Listening to an employee who needs your support
Courage	Standing up for principles despite the risks	Initiating a difficult conversation with a coworker
Humility	Recognizing our limits and being willing to learn	Exploring downsides of your proposal
Integrity	Acting consistently with your own and with societal values	Creating a LinkedIn profile that matches your resume
Vulnerability	Being willing to accept emotional exposure	Sharing with your coworkers that you need help meeting a deadline

Vadim Sazhniev/ iStock/Getty Images

Michael Burrell// Alamy Stock Photo

Throughout the book, you'll read about the relationship between your personal character and business communication. Next, you'll learn a communication model that begins with you.

1-2 Components of Communication

How does communication happen in organizations, and how can you make good decisions about your own communication? In this section, you'll learn the basic process of communication: creating a message and getting a response from the audience. Then you'll see how to use the process at work with the character, audience, message (CAM) model.
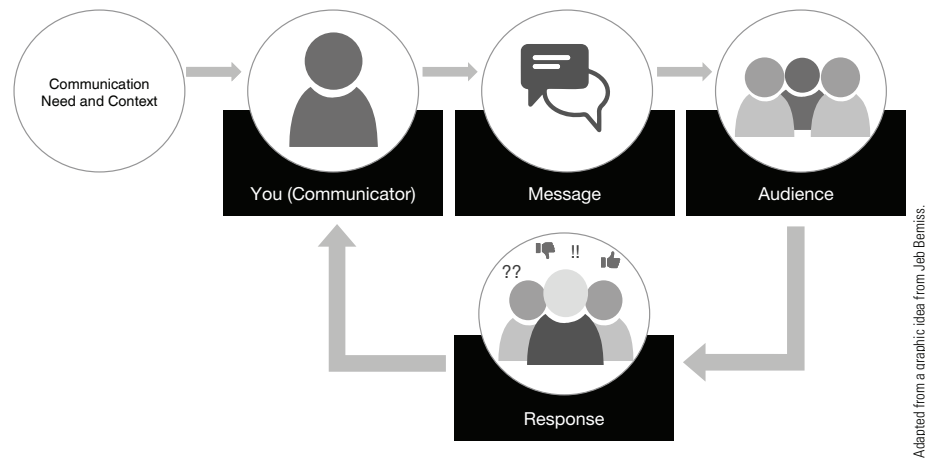
1-2a How Communication Happens

Communication consists of several components, shown in Figure 2. The communication need and context drive initial decisions about the message. Next, the communicator creates and sends the message—for example, an email, a presentation, or a tweet—that the audience receives. At this point, the audience becomes the sender of a new message—the response, which includes emotional and other reactions.

Of course, communication is far more complex than this model conveys. Messages themselves are complex compilations of explicit and implicit content as well as obvious and subtle emotion. Also, the audience **filters** the message according to their own knowledge, biases, experience, background, and so on. Communication barriers get in the way of messages being received as they were intended, and a response could cause the sender to change course.

In addition, when people interact, they create new meaning together. Communication has consequences: outcomes affect understanding and future interactions.[12]

Figure 2 | How Communication Happens

Communication Need and Context → You (Communicator) → Message → Audience → Response

Adapted from a graphic idea from Jeb Bemiss.

1-2b The CAM Communication Model

With a basic understanding of how communication happens, you can follow three steps to develop your own messages: the CAM model—character check, audience analysis, and message and medium, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 | CAM Communication Model

Character Check   Audience Analysis   Message and Medium

In the CAM model, you'll notice that analyzing your audience comes before you craft your message. The audience receives the message, but first we need to understand ourselves (the character check) and the audience. Then we can send a message that reflects well on ourselves and addresses the needs of those affected.

The rest of this chapter describes what to consider at each stage of the CAM model. Following are a few questions to ask yourself as you make communication decisions:

- **Character Check:** What drives me to communicate? To what am I reacting, and what is my purpose? What impact do I want to have? How do I want others to perceive me? How can I demonstrate good character?
- **Audience Analysis:** How can I tailor my communication to my audience? What context should I consider? How does communication travel within the organization? What barriers might get in the way?
- **Message and Medium:** What is the content of my message, and how will I convey that message?
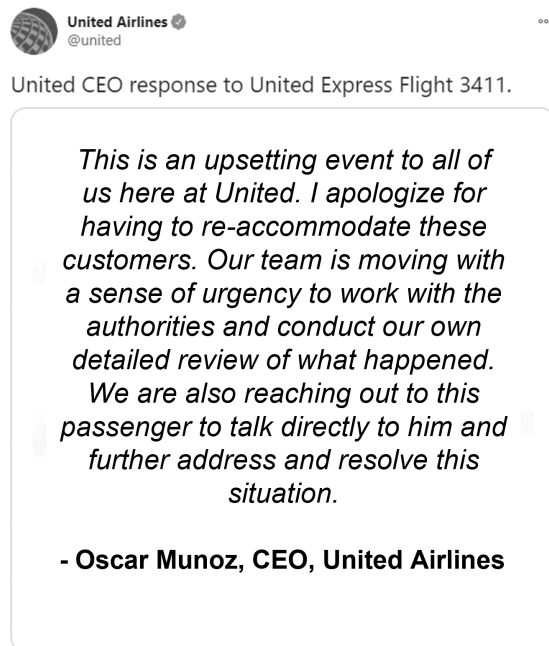
1-3 Character Check

By checking in with yourself first and developing self-awareness, you more likely will demonstrate good character in your communication. This section gives you tools to improve your self-awareness, stay within the law, and make ethical decisions.

We'll evaluate one example using the CAM model: former United Airlines CEO Oscar Munoz's first communication after a viral video of a passenger being forcibly removed on a plane (Figure 4).[13] The airline needed seats for four United employees, and after passengers didn't accept vouchers for other fights, Dr. David Dao was selected to be bumped. He refused to leave his seat and was dragged down the aisle, first screaming and then unconscious with a bloody face.[14]

United Airlines Communication Example | **Figure 4**

United Airlines ✔
@united

United CEO response to United Express Flight 3411.

This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.

- Oscar Munoz, CEO, United Airlines

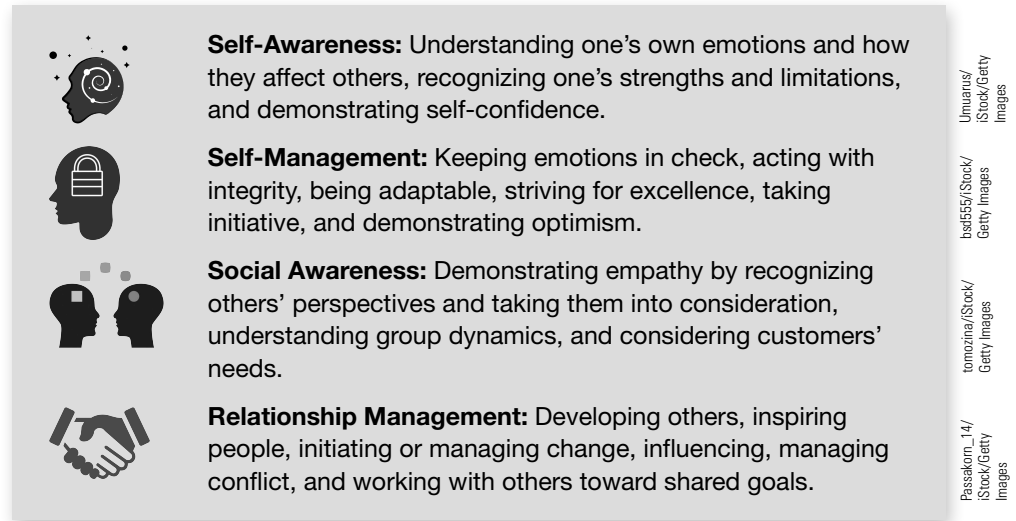## 1-3a Self-Awareness and Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness was identified as "the most important capability for leaders to develop" by the 75 members of the Stanford Graduate School of Business's Advisory Council.[15] Daniel Goleman identifies self-awareness as the first component in his groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence*.[16] He describes self-awareness as an ongoing process of knowing ourselves and our emotions, strengths, and weaknesses—an honest, realistic assessment that isn't too harsh or too optimistic.[17,18]

People with high **emotional intelligence** (or EQ, for emotional quotient) share the four competencies shown in Figure 5.[19] Which of these competencies did the United Airlines' tweet fail to demonstrate? A few obvious examples are demonstrating empathy, considering customers' needs, and managing conflict.

Author of the book *Insight*, Tasha Eurich extends the definition to include "internal" and "external" self-awareness.[20] You might think that you're self-aware, but Eurich found that only 10 %–15% of us really know ourselves and, just as important, know how others perceive us.[21] Regularly seeking feedback is one way to improve our external awareness.

In each book chapter, look for questions with the "Emotional Intelligence" icon in the margin. Responding honestly will improve how well you understand yourself and how your communication affects your relationships with others.

Figure 5 | Emotional Intelligence Competencies

Self-Awareness: Understanding one's own emotions and how they affect others, recognizing one's strengths and limitations, and demonstrating self-confidence.

Self-Management: Keeping emotions in check, acting with integrity, being adaptable, striving for excellence, taking initiative, and demonstrating optimism.

Social Awareness: Demonstrating empathy by recognizing others' perspectives and taking them into consideration, understanding group dynamics, and considering customers' needs.

Relationship Management: Developing others, inspiring people, initiating or managing change, influencing, managing conflict, and working with others toward shared goals.

CHARACTER

Assessing our internal and external self-perceptions is particularly critical for character development because character is judged externally as much as it is internally. Ideally, we know ourselves as we are known to others.[22] How did others perceive Munoz's tweet about the passenger? As we'll see next, not very well.

1-3b Communication Need and Purpose

Today's leaders are in a tough spot. They serve many constituencies—employees, shareholders, customers, the media, the board of directors, and other groups.[23] Munoz's primary objective may have been to protect the company and employees, and this intent certainly is understandable.

But his tweet represents a short-term view—likely a response to internal pressure and a desire to protect his job. Munoz begins with a vague reference to the incident and describes how employees are affected: "This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United." He starts the remaining sentences with "I," "Our team," and "We" and doesn't mention the passenger by name. As any CEO would in this situation, he wants to make the problem go away—to "resolve this situation"—but Munoz fails to consider what others need: a real apology and a commitment to do better next time.

Leaders of high character don't try to smooth things over. With external self-awareness, they take a hard look at how others might perceive them. Then they communicate to achieve better outcomes for more people than just themselves. They think strategically and broadly about long-term impacts of their communication.

To determine your own motivation before you communicate, identify the **communication need**—either from your own thinking or from an organizational situation. Be honest about your purpose and what drives you. Are you looking for accolades or revenge? Are you angry and wanting to show who is in charge? Or do you genuinely want to improve the way others work? Getting clear about what a successful outcome of your communication looks like will keep you focused on what matters. At the same time, you do need to consider legal consequences.

1-3c Potential Legal Consequences of Communication

A leaked United Airlines email from Munoz assured employees, "Our employees followed established procedures for dealing with situations like this."[24] Munoz probably wanted to protect United from lawsuits, and he was right to do so. In a business environment, legal considerations are a real threat.

When you work for a company, anything you write and say may become public during a legal investigation. In a discovery process, the company being investigated must produce evidence related to an inquiry, including emails, IMs, texts, recorded phone conversations, voicemail messages, and other communications the attorneys believe are relevant.
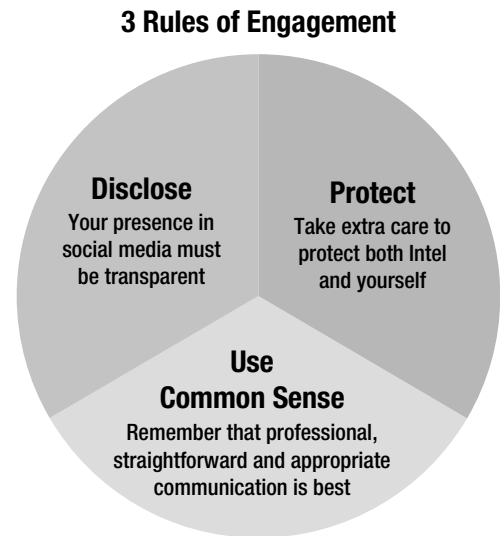
When you join a company, you will probably sign several policies about communicating at work. These are designed to protect the company against lawsuits; public relations nightmares; and breaches of confidentiality, privacy, and security.

Your company may provide social media guidelines, such as Intel's, shown in Figure 6.[25] Intel summarizes the advice to employees:

> What do our policies mean? They mean that we trust you. We bring smart people into the Intel family, and we expect you to make smart decisions. This means that you are both the person in the best position to tell the world why Intel is such an amazing place to be and the person best suited to protect Intel from harm.

Intel's Social Media Guidelines | **Figure 6**

3 Rules of Engagement

Disclose
Your presence in social media must be transparent

Protect
Take extra care to protect both Intel and yourself

Use Common Sense
Remember that professional, straightforward and appropriate communication is best

You can protect yourself and your company by paying careful attention to what you put in writing and what you say. A law firm suggests asking yourself, "Would I be comfortable two years from now being cross-examined in federal court in front of a jury about the content of this email I am about to send?"[26] If you wouldn't, then don't send the email. You might ask yourself the same question for all communications related to your company.

1-3d Ethics and Communication

Beyond the legal requirements, companies will expect you to communicate ethically. Each of us has personal **ethics**, or moral principles, that go beyond legal rules to guide how we act. Our ethics represent our personal belief about whether something is right or wrong. As children, we begin forming our ethics based on how we perceive the behavior of our parents, other adults, and our peer group.

Ethics in
COMMUNICATION

Three types of ethics guide our behavior:

- **Professional ethics** are defined by an organization. Employees and members are expected to follow these guidelines, which define what is right or wrong in the workplace—often beyond established laws. For example, your university has academic integrity guidelines to discourage cheating.
- **Social ethics** are defined by society. Cheating also is generally frowned upon by society, as evidenced by public outrage after news reports uncovered incidents of wealthy families inventing athletic profiles, cheating on exams, and offering compensation to get their children admitted into a preferred college.[27]
- **Individual ethics** are defined by the person and are based on family values, heritage, personal experience, and other factors. You have your own beliefs about cheating that guide your behavior.

Why do ethical people make unethical decisions? Some take the easy route. Others strive to win at any cost. Research shows that circumstance makes people most susceptible to bad behavior[28]—**situational ethics**. Michael Lewis, who started his career in investment banking and wrote *The Big Short*, warns of "Occupational Hazards of Working on Wall Street":

> The question I've always had about this army of young people with seemingly endless career options who wind up in finance is, What happens next to them? People like to think they have a "character" and that this character of theirs will
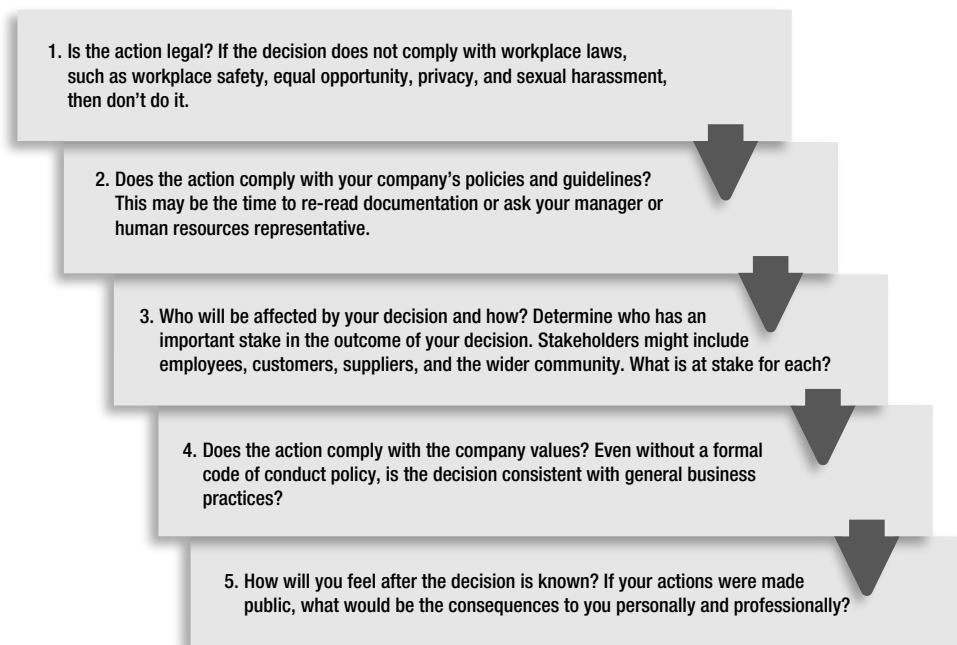
endure, no matter the situation. It's not really so. People are vulnerable to the incentives of their environment, and often the best a person can do, if he wants to behave in a certain manner, is to carefully choose the environment that will go to work on his character.[29]

Organizations try to manage ethical behavior, for example, by publishing procedures and codes of ethics, but some of these efforts backfire by removing judgment and good decision making from an employee's job.[30] In the United Airlines example, employees followed strict procedures instead of their conscience.[31,32] In a later email, Munoz admitted, "It happened because our corporate policies were placed ahead of our shared values. Our procedures got in the way of our employees doing what they know is right."[33]

When faced with an ethical decision, consider the questions in the Framework for Ethical Decision Making shown in Figure 7. Using these questions, we can assess the decision of airport employees who dragged Dr. Dao off the plane. Removing a passenger may be legal, but assault is not. The act complied with procedures—to a fault, negatively affecting Dr. Dao, other passengers, and, in the end, company stakeholders and the public. Clearly, the action didn't represent company values, and those involved were most likely embarrassed by the viral video.

Figure 7 | Framework for Ethical Decision Making

1. Is the action legal? If the decision does not comply with workplace laws, such as workplace safety, equal opportunity, privacy, and sexual harassment, then don't do it.

2. Does the action comply with your company's policies and guidelines? This may be the time to re-read documentation or ask your manager or human resources representative.

3. Who will be affected by your decision and how? Determine who has an important stake in the outcome of your decision. Stakeholders might include employees, customers, suppliers, and the wider community. What is at stake for each?

4. Does the action comply with the company values? Even without a formal code of conduct policy, is the decision consistent with general business practices?

5. How will you feel after the decision is known? If your actions were made public, what would be the consequences to you personally and professionally?

Like character, business ethics are conveyed in our communication. With the name "Robinhood," the investment app is associated with something noble, as the legendary Robin Hood was known for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. But the company purpose is to generate revenue, and the effect on people's lives can be dire. After checking your own character—with an honest assessment of your purpose, a clear awareness of yourself, knowledge of legal implications, and sound ethical decision making—you will be ready to move to the next step of the CAM model, audience analysis.

1-4 Audience Analysis

Communication doesn't happen in a vacuum. Good communicators consider what context drives their message, how communication travels within an organization, and what barriers might interfere. In Chapter 3, you'll learn a more detailed process for analyzing an audience for a particular message. For now, let's review strategic considerations for business communication using the example of applying for a job.

1-4a Communication Context

As an authentic person, you portray yourself similarly in any situation. But realistically, you communicate differently at home with your parents, in class with your professor, at a party with friends, and in a restaurant on a first date. The best communicators are adaptable; they scan the environment and adjust their messages and style to what the situation requires and what is appropriate for the audience.

When you apply for a job, the context drives how you approach your communication. If a friend recommended that you apply for a Starbucks headquarters position in Seattle, you might send an email to her contact to start the conversation. But if you saw a sign up in your local Starbucks in Boulder CO, you would more likely dress well one day, visit the store, and ask to speak with the manager. If your cousin left a position at Starbucks, you might express interest in the opening. But if you learn your cousin was fired, pursuing the job would be hurtful. If you apply for a marketing job, you might send a resume that showcases your creative skills, which wouldn't be appropriate for an application for a financial position.

All these situations require what is called **organizational** or **political savvy**. Your ability to navigate and adapt to individual personalities, styles, and situations as well as organizational culture, history, and structure determines your success as a communicator. Next, we'll see how communication travels within an organization.

1-4b Communication Directions

In any organization, communication flows through formal and informal networks. When you know how to navigate these networks, you have a better chance of getting the results you want from your messages. Again, we'll use the example of applying for a job to illustrate how communication moves among people and departments.
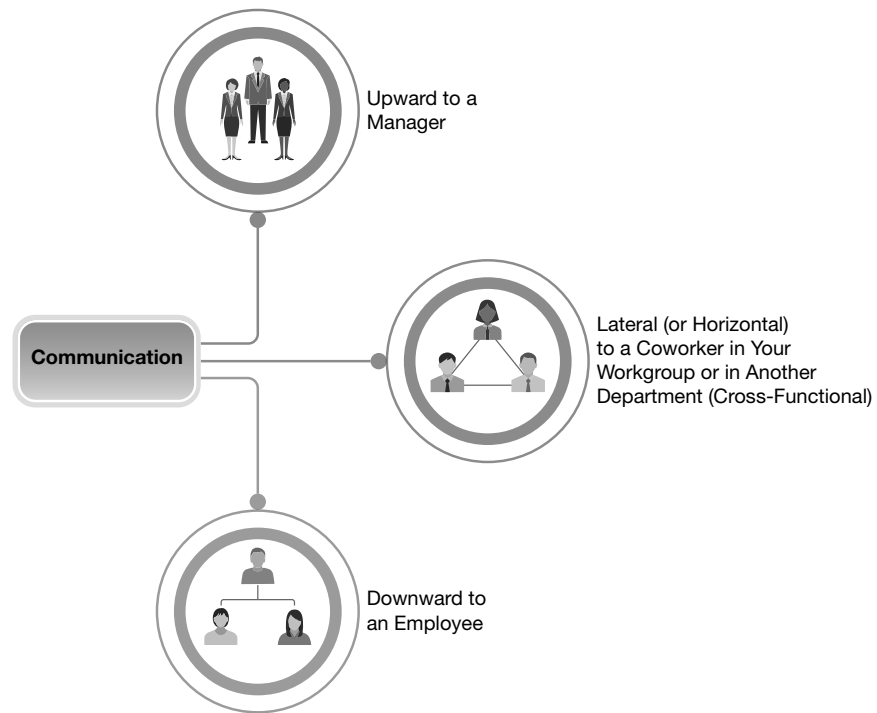
The Formal Communication Network

Three types of communication make up an organization's **formal communication network**—downward, upward, and lateral—shown in Figure 8. **Downward communication** is the flow of information from managers to their employees (people who report to them). If you send your resume to the head of human resources or chief people officer, that person will probably forward it to a lower-level manager—for example, the director of recruiting, who might pass it along to the college recruiting manager. This process is called **cascading communication**, which directs information from one level in an organization down to another.

Upward communication is the flow of information from lower-level employees to upper-level employees or managers. Upward communication provides managers with feedback about their communication, suggestions for improving the business, and information needed for decision making. The college recruiter would ask the director of recruiting for approval to bring you to headquarters for an interview.

Lateral communication (also called **horizontal communication**) is the flow of information among peers within an organization. Through lateral communication, employees coordinate work, share plans, negotiate differences, and support each other. Lateral communication can be challenging in an organization because you're trying to influence coworkers but have no management authority over them.

Figure 8 | The Formal Communication Network

Communication is particularly difficult when the lateral communication is **cross-functional**—across different departments, divisions, or branches. In these situations, you'll need to rely on your relationship-building and persuasive communication skills to rally support and accomplish your goals. The college recruiter (who typically works in a department called human resources, talent management, people operations, or human capital) supports hiring managers in different lines of business—for example, finance, technology, and sales. During the hiring process, you may be a recruiter's top choice, but the hiring manager, to whom you'll report, typically makes the final decision.

The Informal Communication Network

Employees share information through the **informal communication network** (or **grapevine**). If you tell friends who work at Starbucks that you want to work there, they might text each other about which open positions might be the best fit for you. You also might check Glassdoor to see what employees say about the working environment and interview process.

The grapevine has negative consequences too. Without good formal communication, the grapevine will take over. People need information, particularly when they fear changes that may affect them. Although the grapevine is surprisingly accurate,[34] managers who let the grapevine function as employees' main source of information miss out on the chance to convey their own messages. Rather than trying to eliminate the grapevine (a futile effort), competent managers act quickly and use the formal communication network (meetings, email, the intranet, and newsletters) to get ahead of rumors. When managers have a history of sharing timely, accurate information, they are viewed as **transparent** and develop trust over time.

Savvy managers also identify key influencers in an organization to get accurate messages infused into the grapevine. This process requires organizational savvy as well as relationship

Emotional INTELLIGENCE

Think about a time when you used the informal communication network. How did your relationship skills help or hinder your goals?

management—one component of emotional intelligence, which involves inspiring people, influencing, working with others toward shared goals, and other skills. These skills are important to overcome communication barriers.

1-4c Communication Barriers

Considering the complexity of the communication process, your audience may not receive messages exactly as you intend. **Communication barriers** may be verbal (what you say) or nonverbal and may be categorized as language, cultural, attitudinal, or emotional.[35,36]

Language Barriers

The most obvious communication barriers are caused by differences in language. When people speak different languages, they will have trouble understanding each other. An interpreter (for oral communication) or translator (for written communication) may be used, but problems still occur. Important documents should first be translated into the second language and then retranslated into English.

Even when people speak the same language, different accents and terms can get in the way of communication. As the saying goes, "England and America are two nations divided by a common language."[37] Sometimes senders and receivers attribute different meanings to the same word or attribute the same meaning to different words.

Every word has both a denotative and a connotative meaning. **Denotation** refers to the literal, dictionary meaning of a word. **Connotation** refers to the subjective, emotional meaning that you attach to a word. For example, the denotative meaning of the word *plastic* is "a synthetic material that can be easily molded into different forms." For some people, the word also has a negative connotation—"cheap or artificial substitute"—or they associate the term with its environmental impact. Are your reactions likely to be the same as everyone else's? Some terms cause an emotional reaction that turns off the receiver and harms your relationship.

Similarly, what you intend when you use an expression may differ from its literal interpretation. When the United Airlines CEO wrote that the airline had to "re-accommodate" the passenger, he used company jargon for "find another seat." He certainly didn't mean what we saw on video. Late-night host Jimmy Kimmel criticized the word choice: "That is such sanitized, say-nothing, take-no-responsibility, corporate, B.S. speak."[38]

In Chapter 4, you'll learn more about slang, jargon, clichés, and euphemisms, like those in Figure 9. These terms are useful as business shorthand, particularly for similar groups of people, but they are often misunderstood or perceived negatively by people outside of a group, causing problems in communication.

As a business communicator, your primary goal is to be understood. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, offered this communication advice: "Help people know what you're talking about. The goal isn't to show how smart you are."[39] Ask yourself whether you're trying to impress rather than express; this might convey arrogance or insecurity rather than humility.
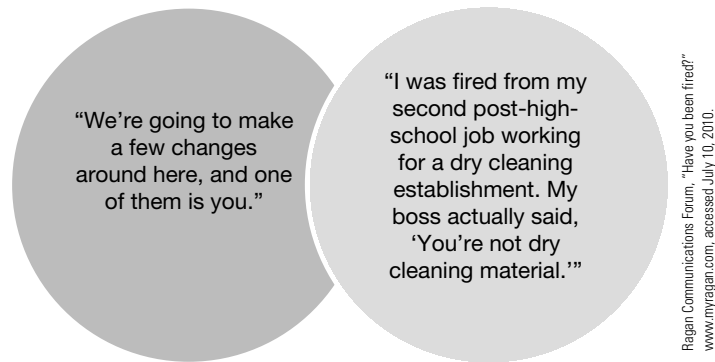
Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers extend beyond mere language differences and affect our communication style and choices. For example, our culture may influence how and when we offer criticism or speak up at meetings. Our culture also affects how we dress and whether and how we might pray at work, which communicates what we value.

Emotional **INTELLIGENCE**

Which of the verbal and nonverbal barriers do you find most challenging? What can you do to overcome these barriers at work and in your personal life?

International **COMMUNICATION**

CHARACTER

Figure 9 | Euphemisms Used to Fire Employees

"We're going to make a few changes around here, and one of them is you."

"I was fired from my second post-high-school job working for a dry cleaning establishment. My boss actually said, 'You're not dry cleaning material.'"

Ragan Communications Forum, "Have you been fired?" www.myragan.com, accessed July 10, 2010.

In addition, culture affects how we perceive others' communication. Organization behavior researcher Nancy J. Adler explains the impact:

> Our interests, values, and culture act as filters and lead us to distort, block, and even create what we choose to see and hear. We perceive what we expect to perceive. We perceive things according to what we have been trained to see, according to our cultural map.[40]

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We make judgments—often unfairly—about others' behaviors, and we are prone to **stereotyping**, assuming that the behavior of one person in a group represents everyone in that group. Instead, you could practice curiosity, being open to learning about others' values and beliefs.

Attitudinal Barriers

Based on our culture and experience, we hold certain attitudes about the world and about work, which affects how we send and receive messages. Our political views, ideas about power and change, personality, motivation, self-esteem, and so on, cause us to interpret communication according to our ways of thinking.

Let's revisit the example of Robinhood from the chapter opening. A young, inexperienced investor who needs to pay tuition reads, "Sign up and get your first stock for free."[41] She gets excited and opens an account. But someone recovering from a gambling addiction reads the same message and wonders what the catch is. She is skeptical and immediately closes the app—not what the Robinhood marketing staff intended.

For another example, let's revisit your application to Starbucks. Your resume includes your work experience at Dunkin' Donuts, which you believe to be an asset to the company. But the recruiter knows the store where you worked and doesn't like how people are managed. He prefers to hire people with no experience and train them "the Starbucks way." Knowing your audience well and adapting your message to them will increase the chance that your message is interpreted as intended, but attitudinal barriers will always exist in communication.

Emotional Barriers

Emotional involvement is essential to communication. As you saw earlier, an audience responds to a message with any number of emotions, and that response affects ongoing communication.

For you, as the communicator, a moderate level of emotional involvement is authentic and appropriate, but too much can hinder communication. If you're excessively angry at a coworker or overly upset about something that happened at home, you might have a difficult time conveying information or fully listening.

These situations provide an opportunity to practice emotional intelligence. Keep your emotions in check, but rather than ignore or push aside how you feel, you might choose to be vulnerable and demonstrate courage—two character dimensions. Try telling your coworkers how you feel and letting people know what's happening outside work. Being open about your life, within reason, gives coworkers the chance to be compassionate with you.

Likewise, you might struggle to communicate when someone else is excessively emotional. In these situations, describe what you observe, ask questions to understand the source of the concern, and demonstrate empathy.[42] Disregarding emotions tends to make communication more challenging, not less.

Other Barriers

Additional barriers may cause problems at work. Communication may be impeded by physiological barriers—such as hearing loss, memory loss, and speech difficulties—and by physical barriers—such as dividers between cubicles. Other culprits that interfere with communication are technology problems, such as a slow Internet connection or a misdirected email; **environmental noise**, such as construction, an uncomfortable chair, or a family member during a Zoom call; and competing and **distracting noise**, such as too much schoolwork or a messy workspace.

Much can go wrong when we communicate, but knowing how to recognize and overcome barriers increases your chance of success. With a good sense of these factors and others related to your audience, you're ready to focus on your message and the medium.

1-5 Message and Medium

Whether a communication achieves your objectives depends on how well you construct the **message** (the information to be communicated). Verbal messages (traditionally referred to as "oral") are transmitted through meetings, telephone conversations, voicemails, podcasts, conference calls, or videoconferences. Written messages are transmitted through emails, reports, blogs, web pages, brochures, tweets, posts, or company newsletters. Nonverbal messages are transmitted through facial expressions, gestures, or other body movements. With so many options (channels or media), the real challenge is choosing the best **medium**—whether traditional or technology based—for your message.

1-5a Traditional Communication Channels

Traditional forms of oral and written communication still exist in all organizations today, although they are declining—particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital communication flourished.[43] Fortunately, people still do meet in person. One-on-one, team, or large-group face-to-face meetings are the most personal forms of business communication and the best choice for building relationships. At many organizations, flip charts and handouts are used during these meetings and during training programs.

Organizations still print written communications—slick, colorful brochures; internal newsletters for employees without computer access; financial statements for customers who opt out of the

> **Emotional INTELLIGENCE**
>
> Think about a time when your emotions got in the way of communication. How do you manage your emotions without denying them?

> **CHARACTER**

> **LO5** Choose the best medium for your message in a business situation.

electronic format; sales letters; and periodicals, such as magazines, journals, and newspapers. Complex reports also may be printed because they're difficult to read on a computer screen. In an office, a rare printed memo or postal letter likely will convey important information about pay or benefits.

1-5b Technology-Based Communication Media

In addition to older communication technologies (email and phone), **computer-mediated communication (CMC)**—for example, instant messaging, videoconferencing, and social media—offers many options for sending and receiving messages.

Email and Phone

Email tends to be the default choice for communication,[44] even when face-to-face communication would work better,[45] and sending an email to someone in the next cubicle is common. More and more, phone calls are viewed as intrusive,[46] and young people are uncomfortable making and receiving calls.[47] Sometimes, we avoid the phone and hide behind email, which could be an issue of courage.

Instant and Text Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) and texting are popular at work. For short messages and quick questions, these channels are ideal, and they may outlive email.[48] Of course, with smartphones, email also may elicit an instant response, but this varies by organization and people. The real value of messaging apps is "presence awareness"—you know when someone is available to respond immediately.

Texting is common in business, and most customers want companies to text them.[49] Because texts are far more likely to be opened than emails, companies use texts for short messages—for example, to confirm deliveries, offer discounts, and send billing and appointment reminders.[50] Internally, busy managers may encourage employees to text rather than email, but companies should have policies in place to describe what is appropriate for this medium.[51]

Videoconferencing

Zoom and Microsoft Teams became go-to applications for online meetings and videoconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were quarantined. With video, screensharing, whiteboarding, polling, chat, and file-sharing capabilities, these platforms have obvious advantages over in-person meetings—for example, easier scheduling and less travel. In addition, people might feel more at ease at home and more comfortable participating.[52]

Social Media

Social media gives companies tremendous opportunities to connect with people online. Companies engage with customers and the public on the internet, with employees on a proprietary **intranet**, and with franchisees and others on an **extranet**.

For many companies, social media focuses on **user-generated content (UGC)**, also called **consumer-generated media (CGM)**. This content is created on **social networking** sites, a subset of social media. LinkedIn is one example, where people share career and business information. Using a donut analogy, updated from a viral "Social Media Explained" post,[53] Figure 10 describes how a donut shop might use popular social sites.[54]

1-5c Choosing Communication Media

Given all these media choices, which is best for your message? For a large-scale change, companies will send multiple messages through a variety of communication channels to reach different audiences. For example, to announce a company acquisition, executives might hold a conference call with analysts, meet with the management team in person,

Instagram: Look at a photo and read a story about donuts.

Facebook: See how much we like donuts.

Twitter: Read news about the best donut in Cincinnati.

YouTube: Watch our chef make donuts.

TikTok: Watch a short, funny video of people eating donuts.

LinkedIn: Read an article about our history.

Pinterest: Get a recipe to make donuts at home.

Snapchat: See a customer eating donuts.

WhatsApp: Message or call a friend about donuts.

WeChat: Video or call a friend; order and pay for donuts.

Bloomicon/Shutterstock.com; Ingvar Björk/Alamy Stock Photo

send an email to all employees, and write a press release. This coordination is part of a strategic communication plan created at senior levels in an organization.

For simpler communications, consider the questions in Figure 11 about the audience, message, and logistics to guide you. Embedded in the questions is the concept of **rich** and **lean media**.[55] The richest media are in person—allowing for real-time, or **synchronous**, interactivity and cues, such as body language. The leanest media are static, or one-way, and provide no social cues. Although Zoom and other platforms aren't *exactly* like being "live," they are close, and they provide cues that traditional communication channels don't offer, such as voting, tagging, and liking.[56]

Typically, complex and emotional messages are best delivered with rich media, while routine and simple messages may be delivered with lean media. Although perceptions of communication media vary, Figure 12 shows a rough continuum. Do you agree with this sequence? From your own experience and perspective, which would you move, and why? For example, is a Zoom meeting richer than an in-person meeting because it offers more options for interactivity, such as chat and breakouts?

Media choice is complicated further because media are converging, with multiple forms available on one platform or app. For example, are blogs and IMs richer than videos if they include an embedded video?
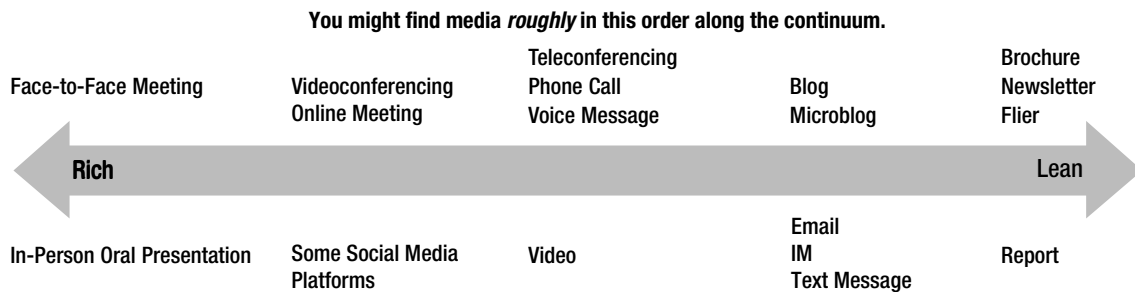
1-5d Multicommunicating

Imagine that you're meeting with a customer in person and send a text to someone back at the office to ask a quick product question. Or you're on a phone call and respond to an IM. These examples are considered multitasking or, more accurately, **multicommunicating**, or engaging in overlapping conversations.[57]

Multicommunicating can be effective—up to a point. Can you watch a recorded class lecture, listen to music, and text at the same time? You may think you're good at multitasking,

Figure 11 | Considerations for Choosing Communication Media

Audience
- What is the communicator's relationship with the audience? Is it a strong, existing, or long-term relationship?
- Are interactivity and feedback important?
- At what level of the organization is the audience?
- Is this group, in general, senior, junior, or at the same level as the communicator?

Message
- Is the communication neutral, positive, or potentially bad news? How is the audience likely to react?
- What are the organizational norms for this type of communication?
- Is this message confidential or private in any way?
- Does the message or conversation need to be documented?

Logistics
- What access to technology does the audience have?
- How long is the message? How complex is the information?
- How many people will receive the message?
- How urgent is the message? Does the audience need it immediately?
- Where are the receivers located?
- What is the most practical and efficient delivery method?
- How easily will the receivers understand the message? What's their primary language and reading proficiency?

Figure 12 | Communication Media Continuum

You might find media *roughly* in this order along the continuum.

		Teleconferencing		Brochure
Face-to-Face Meeting	Videoconferencing	Phone Call	Blog	Newsletter
	Online Meeting	Voice Message	Microblog	Flier

Rich ←——————————————————————————→ **Lean**

			Email	
In-Person Oral Presentation	Some Social Media Platforms	Video	IM	Report
			Text Message	

but Stanford University researchers conclude the opposite: "Heavy multitaskers are lousy at multitasking."[58] More accurately, multitasking means switching, or "rapid toggling," between activities—the interruption of one task to perform another. In a Carnegie Mellon University study, people who were interrupted while reading scored less well on test questions than people who weren't interrupted, making people "20% dumber," according to the study sponsors.[59]

Ethics in **COMMUNICATION**

In addition, you can be effective at multicommunicating only if people around you tolerate it. Texting may be acceptable in some meetings but considered rude in others. Pay attention to what your respected peers do and adjust your behavior to match theirs.

1-6 Chapter Closing

After his initial failure, United Airlines CEO Oscar Munoz did a much better job communicating. He demonstrated several character dimensions in subsequent messages.

In an email to customers, Munoz focuses on his audience and tries to rebuild trust. He wrote, "Earlier this month, we broke [customers'] trust when a passenger was forcibly removed from one of our planes. We can never say we are sorry enough for what occurred, but we also know meaningful actions will speak louder than words."[60]

He also appeared on talk shows—a more personal, conversational medium—to convey his apology and commitment to do better in the future. In the next chapter, you learn more about communicating to improve interpersonal and team relationships.

The CAM Model

Every chapter in this book ends with a business communication example to illustrate important concepts covered. These short case studies, which relate to each chapter introduction, include the three components of the CAM model.

The CAM model demonstrates examples of communication so that you can see the *process* of communicating, not just the results. You'll see the model "in action" as an example and then again "in practice," your chance to apply the model using content and tools from each chapter. Over time, using the model will become a habit, and you will consider the steps for all important communications.

CAM

Decide Whether Graphics Are Ethical

| Character Check | Audience Analysis | Message and Medium |

Consider the chapter introduction: Robinhood uses gaming graphics on its app to make investing seem fun and exciting. Imagine that you are the company's VP of marketing, and the CEO asks you—before the decision was made—whether showing confetti, playing cards, and other graphics is ethical.

>>> CHARACTER CHECK

To help you decide whether the confetti is ethical, you choose a few relevant questions from the chapter, including the Framework for Ethical Decision Making.

1. **Is the confetti consistent with general business practices?**
   Yes, in the gaming industry, but certainly not in financial services.

2. **How would I feel if my decision were publicized? What could be the consequences?**
   I would probably feel embarrassed. Any business has the right to make money, but the confetti might lure people into investing, and I would have a tough time living with myself. I want to be a person of integrity—to be honest about the risks involved and not be associated with a company that misleads customers.

>>> AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

1. **Who will be affected by the decision to use graphics and how?**
   Young, inexperienced users would be affected by this decision because the graphics are designed to attract them. The risks aren't immediately apparent and would be camouflaged, for example, by confetti, which is associated with a party.

2. **What directions of communication are relevant to this decision?**
   Because this is a direct-to-consumer app, people make decisions themselves, without needing approval. Inexperienced investors have no lines of authority to consult, which makes them particularly vulnerable.

⟩⟩⟩ MESSAGE AND MEDIUM

1. **What is my assessment?**

   I've made my decision: the confetti and other graphics are unethical, and I'll communicate that message to the CEO.

2. **What main points will I include?**

   I'll focus on our affiliation with the financial services industry and the potential negative impact of showing gaming graphics.

3. **In what medium will I communicate the message?**

   I'll meet with the CEO in person. I want to be sensitive because the news might not be welcomed, and I don't want a document trail in case the company decides to use the graphics despite my recommendation.

CAM Write a Company Response

> IN PRACTICE

Imagine that you're one of Robinhood's founders and just learned about the suicide of Alex Kearns, who left a note citing a $730,000 debt on the app. Although the negative balance was temporary, sadly, Kearns did not understand this.[61] (You may research the situation further to prepare for this activity.)

You decide to respond to Kearns' death, convey your condolences, and promise changes. Use the CAM model and the following questions to write your post.

⟫ CHARACTER CHECK

1. How do I feel about Kearns' suicide? Does this touch on personal experience I have had with suicide?

2. Am I proud of the business model? To what extent is the model responsible for provoking Kearns' suicide?

⟫ AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

1. Who is my audience for my message? What impact do I want to have on them?

2. What barriers might get in the way of my message being received as I intend it?

⟫ MESSAGE AND MEDIUM

1. What main points will I include in my message?

2. In what medium will I communicate the message? I'll consider the questions in Figure 11 to help me decide, and I might include multiple formats.

When you're finished answering these questions, read the founders' blog post at https://blog.robinhood.com/news/2020/6/19/commitments-to-improving-our-options-offering. How well did the founders' message address your responses to the CAM model questions? What would you have done differently?

› REFLECTING ON YOUR COMMUNICATION AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

1. **Complete the VIA Survey of Character Strengths.**

   Research shows that, although we need to acknowledge our weaknesses, focusing more on our strengths—and finding ways to use them—has more positive outcomes for people and for those around them.[62] What are your character strengths? Take a free online survey at www.viacharacter.org.[63] You'll be asked for your email address, but you don't need to purchase a report. You may print the web page with your results. Reflect on your weaknesses and your strengths. How can your strengths compensate for your weaknesses?

2. **Write a speech that someone else might deliver about you in ten years.**

   Imagine that you're winning an award from your company or from a community organization for your leadership. What would someone say about you, particularly about ways you were able to overcome obstacles to accomplish all that you did? Include future examples that illustrate your effect on individuals' work or personal lives; your contribution to your team, your company, and your community; and the values you hold and model for others.[64]

3. **Identify your self-awareness archetype.**

   In her article "What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)," Tasha Eurich explains four "archetypes" to categorize current levels of internal and external self-awareness—knowing ourselves and knowing how others perceive us.[65] Ideally, we should seek high external and internal self-awareness.

   From the descriptions in Figure 13, how do you identify? What can you do to move closer to the "aware" category?

Four Self-Awareness Archetypes | **Figure 13**

	LOW EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS	HIGH EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS
HIGH INTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS	**Introspector** Introspectors have a clear understanding of themselves but do not challenge their own views or search for blind spots by asking for feedback.	**Aware** Awares know themselves and seek to understand how others perceive them. Therefore, they operate at the highest level of self-awareness. At the same time, awares recognize that they must continuously work at introspection and must seek feedback from others to maintain a strong sense of self-awareness.
LOW INTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS	**Seeker** Seekers do not yet have a clear understanding of themselves or an understanding of how others perceive them. Without these insights, seekers often feel stuck or frustrated because they do not know how they can improve their performance or their relationships.	**Pleaser** Pleasers have a strong understanding of how others perceive them, but they do not have a strong sense of themselves. They tend to focus on meeting others' needs or expectations at the expense of their own. In the long run, this may hinder their own success and fulfillment.

4. **Prepare for a job interview question about ethical decision making.**

   Imagine that an employer asks you the question, "Tell me about a time when you took action because a situation conflicted with your values."[66] Write a response that includes context or background about the situation, your action, and the result. Emphasize what you learned from the experience. Also prepare for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions. Write possible questions and your answer to each.

5. **Identify your most common communication barriers.**

   List a few times when you had trouble communicating with someone. Do you see a pattern? Consider language, cultural, attitudinal, emotional, and other barriers described in the chapter. Which barriers do you need to address, and what strategies will you use to prevent these barriers from interfering in future communications?

6. **Choose the phone instead of a text or email.**

   Do you default to using text and email when a phone call might be a better choice? Sometime in the next week, consider a situation that you can address by phone. What makes you uncomfortable about having a voice conversation, and how can you work through these feelings? If it's easier, schedule a time for the call, and give the receiver an idea of what you would like to discuss. If you do make the call, reflect afterward on what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

> ## DEVELOPING YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SKILLS

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND CHARACTER

LO1 Describe the relationship between communication and character.

1. **Analyze a leader's message.**

   Find a recent message that demonstrates or fails to demonstrate strong character. Use your own news sources, or go to amynewman.com and choose Chapter 1 from the right side of the page. What in the leader's message demonstrates character? What do the words convey, and what is not said? If you were an advisor to this leader, what changes would you recommend?

2. **Describe someone you know who has strong character.**

   Do you know someone you would describe as having strong character? What examples from this person's communication demonstrate character?[67]

3. **Find examples of character dimensions.**

   From a movie, series, or TV show, find at least five communication examples that illustrate the character dimensions defined in Figure 1. Briefly describe the scene and what the actor does or says to demonstrate each dimension.

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

LO2 Explain components of the character, audience, message (CAM) communication model.

4. **Observe communication in action.**

   While watching a movie, series, TV show, or interview, analyze two people talking. Track how communication happens between the initial communicator and the audience. In particular, note how the audience receives the message and creates a new message. How do the two create new messages and meaning together? In other words, how does the initial message evolve to include the response?

5. **Plan an upcoming communication.**

   Think about a message you need to send, and walk through the character, audience, message (CAM) communication model:

Character Check: What drives you to communicate? To what are you reacting, and what is your purpose? What impact do you want to have, and how do you want others to perceive you? How will you demonstrate strong character?

Audience Analysis: How can you tailor your communication to your audience? What context should you consider? How does communication travel within the organization? What barriers might get in the way?

Message and Medium: What is the content of your message, and how will you convey that message?

CHARACTER CHECK

6. **Reflect on your communication.**

   At the end of a day, write down your answers to the following questions:

   a. What communication makes me feel most proud today? What did I do to contribute to the success? What did others do to contribute to the success?

   b. What communication didn't go as well as I hoped? What happened to interfere? What can I do differently in the future to improve the results of similar communications?

   To develop your communication and self-awareness, use this practice at the end of every day.

> **LO3** Identify factors to consider during the character check step of the communication model.

7. **Describe someone you know who has high emotional intelligence.**

   Do you know someone you would describe as having high emotional intelligence? What examples from this person's communication demonstrate self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management?

8. **Rewrite United Airlines' tweet.**

   Given what you know about the United Airlines situation and business communication, rewrite the tweet shown in Figure 4. Try to do a better job of conveying character in this first message about the incident.

9. **Analyze consequences of email in legal action.**

   The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) sued Facebook for illegal monopolization. Read more about the case at www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2020/12/ftc-sues-facebook-illegal-monopolization. Research the role email plays in the suit, particularly CEO Mark Zuckerberg's 2012 email about acquiring Instagram. How did the email affect the government's case? What lessons do you take from this situation about your own communication?

10. **Assess how a social media policy is implemented.**

    If you're working now and have access to it, share the organization's policy with the class and describe how the policy is implemented. How do employees both abide by and skirt the policy? In what ways are situations handled that are consistent or inconsistent with the policy? If you were a legal advisor to the organization, what revisions would you suggest?

11. **Apply the Framework for Ethical Decision Making to an employment situation.**

    Imagine that you got a job offer and accepted it. You were happy about your decision until you got another offer—this time from your ideal company and in your ideal location. Write responses to each of the questions in the Framework for Ethical Decision Making (Figure 7). Adapt questions to the situation; for example, in addition to company policies, guidelines, and values, consider those of your college. Given your responses, what would you do? If this has happened to you, explain your decision and the consequences.

12. **Discuss ethical dilemmas.**

Working in small groups, identify at least one ethical dilemma one of you has experienced in each of the following categories. Using the Framework for Ethical Decision Making (Figure 7), analyze how you handled the situation and what, if anything, you could have done differently.

   a. Copyright issues or academic integrity—for example, copying someone else's work or discovering that a friend plagiarized a paper.

   b. Confidentiality—for example, sharing information although you were asked not to.

   c. Employment—for example, fabricating or exaggerating information on your resume.

   d. Customer service—for example, giving a customer information you know isn't true.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

13. **Describe the context of a communication.**

Find a news story on businesswire.com or from your own sources about a CEO leaving a company. These communications are sensitive: leaders need to be respectful to the departing CEO and, at the same time, supportive and enthusiastic about an incoming executive. Research the situation and describe the context. For example, did the CEO resign or get forced out? Was the CEO in place for a long time? How do you see these and other factors considered in the announcement? For example, who is quoted and what do they say?

14. **Describe someone you know who has organizational savvy.**

Do you know someone you would describe as having organizational savvy? Perhaps someone is a good networker or knows just the right things to say in business or group situations. What examples from this person's communication demonstrate organizational savvy?

15. **Create an organization chart to identify a company's formal communication network.**

Think of an organization where you worked recently. Create an organization chart for two or three levels of employees. Identify examples of upward, lateral, and downward messages you remember from your experience.

16. **Identify communication barriers between a manager and an employee.**

In the classic business movie *Office Space*, watch Scene 13, "Flair." This communication does not go very well. Identify the communication barriers in this scene.

An interaction in the movie *Office Space* illustrates communication barriers.

MESSAGE AND MEDIUM

17. **Explore how a company uses social media.**

    What's your favorite company? Which of the platforms shown in Figure 10 does the company use and how? If you're a customer, what other ways does the company communicate with you and for what purposes? Which do you consider most and least effective?

18. **Identify clues for ending an email or text chain.**

    Some emails and texts seem to go on forever. At some point, a phone call might work better to resolve an issue. Talk with a partner about a recent experience and how you knew that the current medium was doing more harm than good. What were the consequences of either sticking with it or changing your approach?

19. **Choose communication media for different audiences.**

    Imagine that you're the owner of a retail store and decide to close three of your 14 locations. Working in groups, identify in the communication plan template in Figure 14 which medium you would use to communicate with each audience. You may have multiple communications for some audiences. Include the rationale for your decisions.

Communication Plan Template | **Figure 14**

AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION MEDIUM (OR MEDIA)	RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING THE COMMUNICATION MEDIUM (OR MEDIA)
Store managers		
Store employees		
Loyalty customers		
Other customers		
Suppliers		

20. **Choose how to reject a job offer.**

    Image that you were offered a summer internship but decide not to accept it. With a partner, discuss the most appropriate communication medium to use for your message. Would you use a different medium if you received the offer by email or by phone?

❯ CHAPTER SUMMARY

LO1 Describe the relationship between communication and character.

Communication and character are inextricable. Your character—the sum of who you are as a person—is demonstrated in your decisions and in your communications. Fortunately, you can strengthen your character over time. Every day, you make decisions about how you interact and engage with others. You can choose to focus on better outcomes for others and for yourself in the long term.

LO2 Explain components of the character, audience, message (CAM) communication model.

Communication happens when people send messages that audiences receive. To be a communicator of strong character, approach communication as a process. First, check your own character—what drives you to communicate and what outcomes you want for others and for yourself. Second, analyze your audience to tailor your message depending on the context. Third, plan your message and medium—the content and the delivery mechanism.

LO3 Identify factors to consider during the character check step of the communication model.

During the first step, checking your character, consider ways to develop your emotional intelligence, particularly your self-awareness. Take a longer-term view of your communication, including the impact you want to have on others. Stay within the law and use the Framework for Ethical Decision Making to resolve work dilemmas.

LO4 Describe aspects of the audience to consider in business communication.

During the audience analysis phase, adjust your message to different audiences and be mindful of the organizational context. Consider how communication travels within an organization and what communication barriers may be at play.

LO5 Choose the best medium for your message in a business situation.

During the message and medium phase of the CAM model, consider many options of traditional and technology-based communication. Although email is the default medium, richer channels may be better choices for building relationships. Consider the audience, message, and logistics when deciding which medium is best for the situation and context.

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