



Article:

Nikola Baumann.

The Importance of Effective Communication: Some Food for Thought.

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Guest:

Dr. Nikola Baumann is co-director of the Central Clinical Laboratory and director of Specimen Processing at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and director of the Clinical Chemistry Fellowship Program at the Mayo Clinic.

Randye Kaye:

Hello, and welcome to this edition of "JALM Talk" from *The Journal of Applied Laboratory Medicine*, a publication of the American Association for Clinical Chemistry. I'm your host, Randye Kaye.

Effective communication is a life skill that everyone can struggle with, but it's incredibly important in order for us to understand and connect with others and to build relationships. Now a large part of communication is not what we are actually saying, but how we say it and the non-verbal cues such as eye contact and body language. In addition, each one of us has our own communication style, and it's important to try and match our style with the person or people we're communicating with, in order to be effective. A Pay It Forward article called "The Importance of Effective Communication, Some Food for Thought" published in the January 2017 issue of JALM, discusses the art of effective communication in reference to articles that have been published on the subject. These articles describe the five habits of highly effective communicators, the different styles of communication, and the perhaps, the most difficult communication skill, listening.

It also discusses how the author realized what communication skills have been important in her own professional interactions. The author of this article is Dr. Nikola Baumann, co-director of the Central Clinical Laboratory and director of Specimen Processing at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Dr. Baumann is also the director of the Clinical Chemistry Fellowship Program at the Mayo Clinic, and she's our guest for today's podcast. Welcome Dr. Baumann.

Dr. Nikola Baumann: Thank you very much.

Randye Kaye:

In your article, you mentioned the five habits of highly effective communicators and how those habits actually refer to how you communicate rather than what you say. Could you elaborate on that?

Dr. Nikola Baumann: Yes. The five habits, according to Susan Tardanico who was a *Forbes* contributor, are to mind the say-do gap, make the complex simple, find your own voice, be visible, and finally, listen with your eyes as well as your ears. Each of these habits relates to style and being aware of how you actually communicate. For example, making the complex simple is especially important in today's world of information overload. If you can't get your message across with succinct language, perhaps you don't fully grasp what you're trying to communicate, and people may stop listening. Contrary to what some may think, saying what you mean in as few words as possible is really very effective.

Finding your own voice refers to being real and letting your values show. If you're only regurgitating a corporate message or technical jargon, it's not authentic, and again, people will not absorb the actual message. People tend to respect authenticity. And I think that being visible and listening with your eyes as well as your ears are related to one another. The majority of today's communication, as we all know, is email, texting and messaging, and much is lost or hidden when personal interactions don't occur. Non-verbal communication and body language will often tell you far more than words.

Randye Kaye: Wow, you have touched on so many points. We could probably talk for an hour about each one, but just to continue on, let's clarify a bit more. You referenced an article by Mark Murphy that distilled communication into four styled bins. The analytical, the intuitive, the functional, and the personal, and the article talks about matching, so what are the main attributes of each communication style?

Nikola Baumann: The analytical communicator is very logical and unemotional. They like data, they like facts, and they tend to use very precise language. Intuitive communicators tend to be big picture people who provide broad overviews and they are brief and to the point. They're really not interested in details. They tend to be idea people and out-of-the-box thinkers.

The functional communicator likes to focus on the step-by-step process and details. They tend to be great implementers because no detail will be overlooked.

And finally, the personal communicator is very emotional. Communication will include emotional language and feelings of being connected. They are often great diplomats because they pick up on group dynamics or vibes and can glue a team together.

Randye Kaye: Okay. Do you know what type you are, Dr. Baumann?

- Nikola Baumann: I think that I am actually a hybrid of a few of them.
- I tend to probably be more analytical and intuitive, and a blend of those two.
- Randy Kaye: Interesting, and I'll bet that people are often a blend but one really, really sticks out. I think I'm more an intuitive, but there's a bit of personal in there. So very interesting stuff, so are there any challenges to be aware of when people with different communication styles interact?
- Nikola Baumann: Absolutely. The analytical fact-based communicator will struggle interacting with the personal communicator. And the functional communicator who needs to include every step and detail will drive the big picture-driven intuitive communicator crazy.
- The first step is really to be aware that there are different styles of communication, and while some may function better in certain roles or situations, none is superior. I think by recognizing the different styles, we can become more tolerant and hopefully more appreciative of the strengths of each style. We literally couldn't get work done, or succeed professionally, without a healthy mix of all four types of communicators.
- Randy Kaye: I would say that's probably very true and it's interesting that you say the most underutilized and the least perfected communication skill is listening. So are there any thoughts on how individuals can assess or improve their listening skills?
- Nikola Baumann: Yes, that's very interesting. During the SYCL workshop, we did a listening exercise where people were paired up and one person was designated the listener. Their job was to just listen for two minutes while the other person spoke about any topic they wanted to. There were people who literally could not stay silent and listen for two minutes. I think everyone can do this exercise in their next one-on-one conversation. Focus on listening and stop yourself from interrupting, chiming in with your own experience or finishing the other person's sentence. You may be surprised at how much energy and effort we all spend trying to anticipate what someone will say or thinking of our responses.
- When listening becomes a conscious activity, we will become better at doing it. I love the quote by Stephen Covey, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."
- I believe the single thing everyone can do to be a better communicator today is to be a better listener.

Randye Kaye: And I couldn't agree with you more. It's very hard and I'm assuming that two minutes of listening means you're not checking your smart phone and you're not thinking about an email.

Nikola Baumann: Absolutely! Total focus.

Randye Kaye: We're very distracted these days. Very, very interesting. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Nikola Baumann: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

Randye Kaye: That was Dr. Nikola Baumann from the Mayo Clinic talking about the JALM Pay It Forward article, "The Importance of Effective Communication, Some Food for Thought" for this podcast. Thanks for tuning in for "JALM Talk." See you next time and don't forget to submit something for us to talk about.