# Chapter Guides

This section provides information about the chapters in the textbook and suggested solutions and answers for the activities. Each Chapter Guide includes the following items:

* Chapter outline
* Lecture notes, with the Learning Objective included for each major section in the chapter
* Answers to highlight box questions
* Answers to Test Your Knowledge questions
* Answers to Apply Your Knowledge questions
* Answers to Practice Your Skills activities

Example solutions to cases (complete solutions for cases in Chapters 7-10; guidelines in other chapters with cases)

# Part 1: Understanding the Foundations of Business Communication

The first three chapters give students a general understanding of why good communication skills are important in business, how today’s communication is enhanced through technology, why effective interpersonal communication can be difficult, how communication is used in teams, and how it can overcome intercultural barriers. As you present this material, try to stimulate students to personalize basic concepts. Encourage them to think about their own careers and the communication skills they’ll need to be successful. Ask members of the class who have work experience to comment on the communication requirements and challenges they have encountered.

# Chapter 1: Achieving Success Through Effective Business Communication

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

Understanding Why Communication Matters  
 Communication Is Important to Your Career  
 Communication Is Important to Your Company  
 What Makes Business Communication Effective?  
Communicating as a Professional  
 Understanding What Employers Expect from You  
 Communicating in an Organizational Context  
 Adopting an Audience-Centered Approach  
Understanding the Unique Challenges of Business Communication  
 The Globalization of Business and the Increase in Workforce Diversity  
 The Increasing Value of Business Information  
 The Pervasiveness of Technology  
 The Evolution of Organizational Structures and Leadership Styles  
 A Heavy Reliance on Teamwork  
Exploring the Communication Process  
 The Basic Communication Model  
 Barriers in the Communication Environment  
 Inside the Mind of Your Audience  
 How Audiences Receive Messages  
 How Audiences Decode Messages  
 How Audiences Respond to Messages  
 The Social Communication Model  
Using Technology to Improve Business Communication  
 Keeping Technology in Perspective  
 Guarding Against Information Overload  
 Using Technological Tools Productively  
 Reconnecting with People  
Committing to Ethical and Legal Communication  
 Distinguishing Ethical Dilemmas from Ethical Lapses  
 Ensuring Ethical Communication  
 Ensuring Legal Communication

## LECTURE NOTES

**Section 1: Understanding Why Communication Matters**

*Learning Objective 1: Explain the importance of effective communication to your career and to the companies where you will work.*

Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between *senders* and *receivers*, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic media.

The essence of communication is sharing—data, information, insights, and inspiration.

Communication Is Important to Your Career

Improving your communication skills may be the single most important step you can take in your career.

Even great ideas won’t go anywhere without great communication.

As you take on leadership and management roles, communication becomes even more important.

If you learn to write well, speak well, listen well, and recognize the appropriate way to communicate in any situation, you’ll gain a major advantage that will serve you throughout your career.

Communication Is Important to Your Company

Effective communication helps businesses in numerous ways:

Closer ties with important communities in the marketplace

Opportunities to influence conversations, perceptions, and trends

Increased productivity and faster problem solving

Better financial results and higher return for investors

Earlier warning of potential problems

Stronger decision making

More persuasive marketing messages

Greater employee engagement

What Makes Business Communication Effective?

Stakeholders are groups affected in some way by the company’s actions: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbors, the community, the nation, the world.

When communication breaks down, the results can range from time wasting to tragic.

To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive.

**Section 2: Communicating as a Professional**

*Learning Objective 2: Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.*

If you don’t have a lot of work experience yet, meeting the expectations of a professional environment might require some adjustment.

Professionalism is the quality of performing at a high level and conducting oneself with purpose and pride.

Professionalism can be broken down into six distinct traits:

* Striving to excel
* Being dependable and accountable
* Being a team player
* Demonstrating a sense of etiquette
* Making ethical decisions
* Maintaining a positive outlook

Understanding What Employers Expect from You

Today’s employers expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks:

Organizing ideas and information logically and completely

Expressing ideas and information coherently and persuasively

Actively listening to others

Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences

Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently

Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and usage

Communicating in a civilized manner

Communicating ethically, even when choices aren’t crystal clear

Managing your time wisely and using resources efficiently

Communicating in an Organizational Context

In the formal communication network, ideas and information flow along the lines of command in three directions; downward, upward and horizontally.

In the informal communication network, often referred to as the grapevine or the rumor mill, communication occurs outside the formal network; social media now play a huge role.

Adopting an Audience-Centered Approach

An audience-centered approach involves understanding and respecting the members of your audience and making every effort to get your message across in a way that is meaningful to them.

Also known as adopting the “you” attitude, in contrast to messages that are about “me.”

Etiquette encompasses the expected norms of behavior in any particular situation.

**Section 3:** **Understanding the Unique Challenges of Business Communication**

*Learning Objective 3: Identify five unique challenges of business communication.*

Business communication is often more complicated and demanding than social communication.

Five issues highlight why business communication requires a high level of skill and attention:

The globalization of business and the increase in workforce diversity

The increasing value of business information; companies rely heavily on knowledge workers

The pervasiveness of technology; technology influences virtually every aspect of business communication today

The evolution of organizational structures and leadership styles, with flatter structures, matrix organizations, networks, virtual organizations, and more open corporate cultures

A heavy reliance on teamwork

The Globalization of Business and the Increase in Workforce Diversity

Globalization is the increasing effort to reach across international borders in order to

Market products

Partner with other businesses

Employ workers and executives

Workforce diversity refers to all those differences among the people you come into contact with on the job, including differences in

Age

Gender

Sexual orientation

Education

Cultural background

Religion

Ability

Life experience

The Increasing Value of Business Information

Knowledge workers are employees who specialize in acquiring, processing, and communicating information.

Examples of the value of business information include competitive insights, customer needs, and government regulations and guidelines.

The Pervasiveness of Technology

Technology influences virtually every aspect of business communication today.

If your level of technical expertise doesn’t keep up with that of your colleagues and co-workers, the imbalance can put you at a disadvantage and complicate the communication process.

The Evolution of Organizational Structures and Leadership Styles

Flat organizational structures

Help communication flow faster and with fewer disruptions and distortions

Require more individual responsibility for communication—particularly in the horizontal direction

Specific types of organization structures present unique communication challenges.

In a matrix structure, employees report to two managers at the same time, such as a project manager and a department manager, and have an increased communication burden.

In a network structure, sometimes known as a virtual organization, a company supplements the talents of its employees with services from one or more external partners.

Corporate culture is the mixture of values, traditions, and habits that give a company its atmosphere and personality.

Successful companies encourage employee contributions by ensuring that communication flows freely in all directions within the organization.

An open climate encourages candor and honesty that allows employees to feel free enough to admit their mistakes, disagree with the boss, and share negative or unwelcome information.

A Heavy Reliance on Teamwork

Teams offer organizations many potential advantages and require you to become more responsible for communication.

Teamwork is not always successful, however, and a common reason for team failure is poor communication.

**Section 4: Exploring the Communication Process**

*Learning Objective 4: Describe the communication process model and the ways social media are changing the nature of business communication.*

Even well-intentioned communication efforts can fail.

By understanding communication as a process with distinct steps, you can improve the odds that your messages will reach their intended audiences and produce their intended effects.

The Basic Communication Model

By viewing communication as a process, you can identify and improve the skills you need to be more successful:

The sender has an idea.

The sender encodes the idea as a message.

The sender produces the message in a medium.

The sender transmits the message through a channel.

The audience receives the message.

The audience decodes the message.

The audience responds to the message.

The audience provides feedback.

Considering the complexity of this process, it should come as no surprise that communication efforts often fail to achieve the sender’s objective.

Barriers in the Communication Environment

Messages can be disrupted by a variety of communication barriers:

Noise and distractions, including multitasking

Competing messages

Filters, both human and technological

Channel breakdowns

Everyone in an organization can help minimize barriers and distractions.

Take steps to insulate yourself from distractions, including disconnecting from constant message feeds and updates.

Inside the Mind of Your Audience

For an audience member to receive a message, the receiver has to

*sense* the presence of a message

*select* it from all the other messages clamoring for attention

*perceive* it as an actual message

Five habits to increase the chances that your messages will be sensed, selected, and perceived:

Consider audience expectations

Ensure ease of use

Emphasize familiarity

Practice empathy

Design for compatibility

A received message doesn’t mean anything until the recipient decodes it and assigns meaning to it.

There is no guarantee that the receiver will assign the same meaning that the sender intended.

Audiences tend to extract the meaning they expect to get from a message.

Culture plays a huge role in how messages are decoded.

Individual beliefs and biases influence the meaning that audiences extract from messages.

Selective perception occurs when people distort threatening or confusing information to make it fit their perceptions of reality.

Differences in language and usage influence received meaning.

Individual thinking styles affect message decoding.

Audience members will respond in the way you’d like them to if

They *remember* the message long enough to act on it.

They are *able* to respond as you wish.

They are *motivated* to respond.

The Social Communication Model

The basic model presented in Figure 1.4 shows how a single idea moves from one sender to one receiver.

In a larger sense, it also helps represent the traditional nature of much business communication, which was primarily defined by a *publishing* or *broadcasting* mindset.

In contrast to the publishing mindset, this new social communication model is *interactive* and *conversational*.

Customers and other groups are now empowered through social media, which transform passive audiences into active participants in the communication process by allowing them to share content, revise content, respond to content, or contribute new content.

The social communication model changes business communication in profound ways:

Customers and other stakeholders participate in, influence, and often take control of conversations in the marketplace.

They rely on each other for information about products, offer technical support, and even participate in group buying using social tools.

Web 2.0/social media tools can increase the speed of communication, lower communication costs, improve access to pockets of expertise, and boost employee satisfaction.

A hybrid approach is emerging in which some communications follow the traditional approach and others follow the 2.0 approach.

If you’re an active user of Web 2.0 technologies, you’ll fit right in with this new communication environment—and possibly even have a head start on more experienced professionals.

**Section 5: Using Technology to Improve Business Communication**

*Learning Objective 5: List four general guidelines for using communication technology effectively.*

Today’s businesses rely heavily on technology to facilitate the communication process.

To use communication technology effectively, you need to

* Keep technology in perspective
* Guard against information overload and information addiction
* Use technological tools productively

Disengage from the computer frequently to communicate in person

Keeping Technology in Perspective

Remember that technology is simply a tool, a means by which you can accomplish certain tasks.

Technology is an aid to interpersonal communication, not a replacement for it.

Technology has business value only if it helps deliver the right information to the right people at the right time.

Guarding Against Information Overload

The overuse or misuse of communication technology can lead to information overload, in which people receive more information than they can effectively process.

Information overload makes it difficult to discriminate between useful and useless information, lowers productivity, and amplifies employee stress both on the job and at home.

As a recipient, use the filtering features of your communication systems to isolate high-priority messages that deserve your attention; be wary of subscribing to too many feeds; focus on the information you truly need to do your job.

As a sender, reduce information overload by making sure you don’t send unnecessary messages; indicate the priority of messages to help receivers know how to react to them.

Using Technological Tools Productively

In the “information technology paradox,” information tools can waste as much time as they save.

Inappropriate web use not only distracts employees from work responsibilities but can leave employers open to lawsuits.

Social media can expose confidential information or damage a firm’s reputation in the marketplace.

Employers need clear policies that are enforced evenly for all employees.

Knowing how to use tools efficiently can make a big difference in your productivity.

Managers need to guide and train their employees in productive use of information tools.

Reconnecting with People

Even the best technologies cannot truly match the rich experience of person-to-person contact.

Reconnect in person, or at least over the phone, from time to time in order to maintain positive working relationships.

**Section 6: Committing to Ethical and Legal Communication**

*Learning Objective 6: Define ethics, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.*

Ethics are the principles of conduct that govern behavior within a society.

Ethical communication

Includes all relevant information

Is true in every sense

Is not deceptive in any way

Examples of unethical communication include

Plagiarism

Omitting essential information

Selective misquoting

Misrepresenting numbers

Distorting visuals

Failing to respect privacy or information security needs

The widespread adoption of social media has increased the attention given to the issue of transparency

Distinguishing Ethical Dilemmas from Ethical Lapses

An ethical dilemma involves making a choice when the alternatives aren’t completely wrong or completely right:

Two conflicting alternatives that are both ethical and valid

Two alternatives that lie somewhere in the vast gray area between right and wrong

An ethical lapse is a clearly unethical choice.

Ensuring Ethical Communication

To ensure ethical communication, three elements need to be in place and to work in harmony:

Ethical individuals

Ethical company leadership

The appropriate policies and structures to support employees’ efforts to make ethical choices

A code of ethics is an explicit written policy of ethics guidelines that helps employees determine what is acceptable.

Ethics audits monitor ethical progress and point out any weaknesses that need to be addressed.

Every employee has the responsibility to communicate in an ethical manner.

In the absence of clear guidelines, ask yourself the following questions about your business communication efforts:

Have I defined the situation fairly and accurately?

What is my intention in communicating this message?

What impact will the message have on those who receive it or who might be affected by it?

Will the message achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm?

Will the assumptions I’ve made change over time? That is, will a decision that seems ethical now seem unethical in the future?

Am I comfortable with my decision? Would I be embarrassed if it were printed in tomorrow’s newspaper or spread across the Internet?

Ensuring Legal Communication

In addition to ethical guidelines, business communication is also bound by a wide variety of laws and regulations, including the following areas:

Promotional communication. Marketing specialists need to be aware of the many laws that govern truth and accuracy in advertising.

Contracts. A contract is a legally binding promise between two parties, in which one party makes a specified offer and the other party accepts.

Employment communication. A variety of local, state, and federal laws govern communication between employers and both potential and current employees.

Intellectual property. In an age when instant global connectivity makes it effortless to copy and retransmit electronic files, the protection of intellectual property (IP) has become a widespread concern.

Financial reporting. Finance and accounting professionals who work for publicly traded companies must adhere to stringent reporting laws.

Defamation. Negative comments about another party raise the possibility of defamation, the intentional communication of false statements that damage character or reputation. (Written defamation is called *libel*; spoken defamation is called *slander*.)

HIGHLIGHT BOX: THE ART OF PROFESSIONALISM (p. 7)

Maintaining a Confident, Positive Outlook

1. Yes, employees do have an ethical obligation to maintain a positive outlook on the job, because doing so helps ensure that they perform to expectations—which is what they are being paid for. In addition, their behavior and attitude on the job affects the performance of other employees. However, they also have an ethical obligation to keep the company’s best interests in mind, and there are times when doing so can mean sharing negative news, raising legitimate concerns, confronting problems, and even whistleblowing if need be.
2. Students should be able to suggest a variety of ways to lift their spirits, including reminding themselves that a positive frame of mind makes the workday easier and faster, refocusing their minds on near- or far-term objectives (e.g., simply completing an unwelcome task to get it off their plates or thinking how completing that task is a step in the direction they want to go), or interacting with colleagues or customers in a positive way that momentarily takes the focus off work and reminds one of the human value in business interaction.

**COMMUNICATION DILEMMAS AT TOYOTA (p. 26)**

1. Toyota always emphasizes a friendly, open style of communication with its customers, even those occasional customers who make unrealistic demands or expect special treatment. Unfortunately, you’ve learned that some of the company’s customer service representatives have been letting their emotions get in the way when dealing with these difficult customers. Several customers have complained about rude treatment. You’re sensitive to the situation because you know that customer service can be a difficult job, particularly in a social media environment where consumers are empowered to broadcast any disappointment they may feel. However, having a reputation for hostile customer service could spell doom for the company, so you need to communicate your concerns immediately. Which of the following sentences would be the best way to begin an email message to the customer service staff?

a. No. This implies that everyone in the customer service department is guilty of providing poor service.

b. No. Like (a), this implies that everyone is guilty; its tone is also overly harsh and threatening, particularly when raising this issue for the first time.

c. No. While this option doesn’t blame everyone, its accusatory tone will immediately put everyone on the defensive.

d. Yes. This positive and sympathetic introductory statement (Chapter 8 explores this concept of the *buffer* in more detail) creates a communication environment that is conducive to problem solving, rather than finger pointing.

2. The culture in your office is conscientious and professional but with a generally informal “vibe.” However, as with any company, individual employees vary in how closely their own styles and personalities fit the corporate culture. For example, the new accounting manager in your organization tends to communicate in a formal, distant style that some company old-timers find off-putting and impersonal. Several of these people have expressed concerns that the new manager “doesn’t fit in,” even though she’s doing a great job otherwise. How should you respond?

a. No. These people aren’t just “complaining,” they’re expressing concern about the future of the company’s culture. A company is more than just the sum of its various job functions; the people in those roles also need to work together in some degree of harmony. Therefore, the people raising this issue believe they have a valid concern.

b. No. Demanding that someone change her personal communication style is only going to generate confusion and resentment. Moreover, the company might eventually lose a valuable employee if the manager decides she can’t fit in.

c. Yes. Newcomers can often benefit from a helpful introduction to a company’s culture. The manager might simply be communicating in a style that was expected in her previous employment.

d. No. If her style is causing concern, ignoring the situation isn’t going to make it go away.

3. A false rumor has begun circulating online that Toyota plans to radically reduce the size of its North American marketing operations and transfer the work to corporate headquarters in Japan. Zeinstra asks your advice in handling the situation. Which of the following would you recommend?

a. No. What should employees be expected to believe if the only messages they receive are conflicting rumors coming through the grapevine? Moreover, grapevines are unpredictable; Zeinstra couldn’t be sure that his message would get through undistorted. And finally, the choice of medium itself would send a message—that the company didn’t care enough to bother sending out an official message.

b. Yes. This is a potential crisis that requires both immediate attention and careful handling to calm people’s fears. Face-to-face communication provides the best way to interact with the audience, answering their questions and addressing their fears.

c. No. A blog posting is too passive for a message of this importance, and it doesn’t offer the rich nuances of face-to-face contact that are important when audiences are upset.

d. No. Ignoring the rumor would be a huge mistake. Productivity will immediately fall as people begin worrying more about their jobs than about their work, and some will likely leave the company as well.

4. As major consumer purchases, automobile sales tend to rise and fall with the economy and household incomes. Facing a downturn in the economy, the Toyota management team has decided to enact a 10 percent salary reduction for the next six months and then reevaluate the company’s financial health at that point. However, some of the executives are convinced that the salary reductions will have to continue for a year at least—and perhaps even be permanent. In light of this knowledge, which of the following communication strategies would best balance the needs of the company and the needs of the employees?

a. No. This message is deceptive. It states that full pay will be restored in six months, a conclusion that the management team has not yet reached.

b. No. This message is slightly less deceptive than (a), but it still strongly implies that management has already decided to restore full pay after six months. Even though it gives management an “out” in the event that the pay reduction needs to continue beyond six months, that message is hidden by the phrase *is scheduled to*.

c. No. This message could end up being more negative than it really needs to be.

d. Yes. This message respects the audience’s need for information without putting an unreasonably negative or positive spin on the message. The open, honest nature of this message is also consistent with Toyota’s corporate culture.

## APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE (p. 30)

1. Business is largely a matter of relationships and transactions, both of which are critically dependent on communication. Effective communication fosters closer relationships, which are more productive, and more expedient transactions, which save time and money as well.
2. Social media technologies are changing the nature of business communication and the relationships between companies and their internal and external stakeholders. Audiences now expect to part of an interactive conversation, not passive recipients of fixed messages. Companies need to adapt their communication efforts as well. Instead of transmitting a fixed message, a sender in a social media environment initiates a conversation by sharing valuable information. This information is often revised and reshaped by the web of participants as they share it and comment on it. People can add to it or take pieces from it, depending on their needs and interests. (Note: in early printings, this question was marked as being associated with LO-3, but it relates to LO-4.)
3. Although writing documents for superiors is often part of business, a person repeatedly taking credit for another’s work may still be seen as acting unethically. Employees caught in this situation must decide when action is necessary and appropriate. If they decide to take action, they must figure out how to do so discreetly and respectfully. An employee probably wouldn’t want to embarrass his or her boss by going to higher management. Students must consider whether it would be a good idea to discuss this issue with their boss or find other ways to clarify their role, perhaps through informal lines of communication. Word of mouth can spread far and fast up the organizational ladder.

## ASSISTED GRADING QUESTIONS (accessed on MyBCommLab)

1. Doing your job well is an important aspect of professionalism, but it is only one aspect. In addition to excelling at your job and being dependable, it is important to be a team player, to be respectful, to be ethical, and the maintain a positive attitude.
2. The answer is a definite yes. Communication technology has three potential shortcomings that can and do hamper communication. First, technologies such as email and instant messaging are unable to convey the full richness of human communication, particularly nonverbal signals. For instance, email messages can come across as blunt or overly harsh simply because the medium lacks a practical and effective way to convey emotional nuances. Second, technology can’t replace human planning and oversight. Spellcheckers that correct spelling but “approve” poor word choices or nonsensical phrases are a common example of this flaw. Third, even the best technologies are rarely 100 percent reliable, and if people come to depend on technological channels too heavily, they can be cut off from one another whenever these systems fail.

## PRACTICE YOUR SKILLS (p. 30)

### Message for Analysis

Students will recognize this document as ineffective because it presents so many barriers to effective communication. The blog

* Creates emotional barriers right from the first sentence (accusing employees of lying and cheating, later calling them names), preventing readers from perceiving the intended message
* Presents a restrictive and authoritarian attitude, reflecting an environment that discourages open communication and thus discourages employee candor
* Expresses bias or prejudice (in the slur against women employees)
* Reflects the author’s anger and defensiveness (“I simply have no choice”)
* Assumes bad intentions on the part of the employees, underlining the lack of audience-centered thinking
* Uses vague, confusing language (More than three times during what period? Will have to answer to the author for what specific penalties?)

Polarizes workers by inciting conflict between “punctual” employees and others

### Exercises

1. Look for information about students’ majors, hobbies, likes, dislikes, and future career plans. The email messages, blog posts, or social networking updates will give you an idea of the level of your students’ writing, in addition to helping you learn more about your students.
2. This question provides a good opportunity to discuss the advantages and limitations of utilizing social media for business communication. Students should be encouraged to explain how the content of their messages reflects the demands of a social communication model and medium.
3. This exercise reveals how well students translate the chapter material into a practical analysis of business communication—the first step to crafting more effective messages of their own. Look for descriptions of specific communication elements, such as solid logical argumentation, persuasive emotional appeals, successful integration of audio and video components, or an audience-centric message.
4. In completing this exercise, students should recognize the often significant differences between how they prioritize their own personal and professional qualities and how a prospective employer might prioritize them.
5. This message needs to communicate the importance of the situation without preemptively offending anyone (since there have been no instances of etiquette mistakes and only a general concern about them). The first paragraph could provide the general manager with a brief overview of the situation, describing how customers come in contact with production personnel and explaining the potential damages to sales that could result from etiquette mistakes. The second paragraph could then follow with an explanation of how etiquette training would minimize the risk of lost sales. Depending on the circumstances and the writer's relationship with the recipient, the message might also propose a solution, such as adapting the sales department's etiquette training course for re-use in the production department.
6. Before writing the report, the team will want to know

a. The audience’s culture (so that cultural biases can be avoided)

b. The audience’s level of knowledge about the subject (so that the report’s style, content, organization, and tone will address that level)

c. The environment in which the report will be received (to compensate for any noise interference)

d. Whether the report will be read directly by the intended audience or will first pass through several layers of gatekeepers (so that anticipated distortions can be minimized before the report is read and summarized by gatekeepers)

e. The audience’s gender and family status (because child care may be viewed from a different perspective by men, women, parents, and nonparents)

1. Students’ email messages should point out the following benefits of a wiki-based user manual:

* Offers a reader-centered approach
* Sets up a conversation between customers and the company
* Allows customers to help other customers

Provides a speedy way to respond to customers’ needs

1. Regarding the issue of employee blogs and information that is critical of an employer, a much stronger case can be made for placing such restrictions than for not doing so. Publicly aired criticism of internal company matters is likely to cause harm to the company (by scaring away potential customers, employees, or investors, for instance) while probably doing little or nothing to resolve whatever situations a blogger might be upset about. In fact, an argument can be made that criticizing one’s own employer in public is unethical, since employees are paid to further the company’s interests, not their own. If they are unhappy in their jobs, they have a responsibility to either work to improve the situation through appropriate channels or to find other employment.
2. This exercise challenges students to apply their understanding of the communication process. Ask them to be specific about how they encoded and transmitted the idea they wanted to share; also ask them to explain exactly how they knew whether the message had been accurately decoded.

Students might identify such barriers as a difference in perception due to differences in age, background, culture, or language; a lack of credibility, precision, congeniality, or control; a lack of information about the audience; a misunderstanding caused by unfocused, incoherent, or sloppy communication; a miscommunication resulting from one party being sidetracked or constantly bringing up unnecessary information; an inability to relate new information to existing ideas; or the noise from environmental distractions, from the emotional states of the people involved, or from a person’s poor listening ability.

1. To improve the discussion that this exercise can generate, consider assigning different services to different students. The wide variety of services students will access can provide powerful evidence of how widespread the social communication model has become.
2. Students should recognize that the boss’s request itself is potentially unethical, putting the employee in a situation of policing his or her colleagues—which will surely lead to circumstances in which the employee is forced to be disingenuous with colleagues (e.g., not saying anything to a colleague who steals office supplies but then reporting the behavior to the boss). The employee would want to consider the following in a discussion with the boss: the uncomfortable situation this request will create for the employee, the effect this informal assignment would have on workplace dynamics, the damage to the employee’s career prospects or ability to work with others if colleagues find about such reporting, and last but not least, the fact that asking employees to spy on one another is a misguided way to solve a problem (e.g., ethics training and making employees aware of the costs of their decisions would be a much more enlightened approach).
3. The ethics of each situation may be decided as follows:

a. Keeping quiet about the possible environmental hazard would be an ethical lapse that could possibly affect lives if not wildlife.

b. Stretching the truth, even “a bit,” is never ethical.

c. Helping a friend would be ethical, unless “privileged” information were being conveyed without permission.

d. Using allocated funding for bogus purchases is unethical. It would be better to justify the need for next year’s budget than to preserve it by cheating.

1. Students should be able to identify dozens of potential violations of Cisco’s Code of Conduct. Three examples include entering into or sustaining a business relationship that creates a conflict of interest with an employee’s professional responsibilities at Cisco, providing financial information that is not accurate or not objective, and discussing confidential information with an outside party who is not bound by a nondisclosure agreement. Opportunities to report or discuss ethical concerns include contacting the company’s Ethics Program Office, the General Counsel, or the Audit Committee.