

## How to Apply Rules for Ethical Communication

**Brief:** As a public speaker, you should understand how to apply the key components of ethical behavior, including how to promote truthfulness and contribute to creating positive communication climates.

**Learning Objective:** Understand how to apply key components of ethical communication.

**Key Terms:**

- **Communication climate:** The overall feeling or emotional mood between people and affected by their behavior.

### Credo for Ethical Communication

In its *Credo for Ethical Communication*, The National Communication Association (NCA), one of the primary organizations advancing Communication as an academic discipline, endorses nine rules to foster and promote free and ethical communication. As a public speaker, why should you care about following ethical rules?

First and foremost, your audience not only needs to believe in your words and message—they also need to trust you as message giver. To engage in unethical behavior when speaking only erodes at that trust, otherwise known as “ethos,” one of three appeals necessary to influence your audience.

#### ***Tips for Applying the First Rule***

The first rule of the NCA Credo states, “We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.”

Honesty is an extension of the ethical goals of your speech. No matter how tempting it might be, don't resort to falsehoods or opinions presented as facts to make your case. Commit to coming from a place of authenticity instead of deception. Your audience is smarter than you may think. Even if they are not experts on your topic, they will “sense” that you're not being fully authentic. Inevitably, it will be revealed that you have either lied or even just slightly bent the truth in your speeches and your credibility will be damaged.

Consider why you're speaking. Are you trying to persuade your audience to adopt a certain viewpoint or consider a new idea? If so, you'll want to make sure that you lead your audience to that belief point in an ethical manner. You don't want to use tactics like intimidation. Additionally, have the responsibility and professionalism to know whether or not you have a conflict of interest on a given topic or with a certain audience or venue. Provide your audience with a full disclosure of the conflict of interest and adjust your speech accordingly.

## Communication Climate

The NCA Credo's rule "We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators" speaks to the power of our behavioral choices and the ethical responsibility we all have to each other.

Communication climate, which can be defined as the "overall feeling or emotional mood between people," is directly impacted by the behaviors of the people in those interactions. In much the same way that variables in weather, such as how we feel on a sunny day versus a stormy day, affects our experience of that day, communication climate influences our experience of our daily communication interactions.

### ***Tips for Creating a Positive Communication Climate***

In addition to respecting the diversity of individual communicators, ethical public speakers avoid using the kinds of language that contribute to creating negative communication climates. You should refrain from abusive language when speaking in public, even if it's used in a joking manner. Even unintended use of abusive language can damage the overall climate.

Never attack your audience verbally, even in a debate-style setting where attacking your opponent might seem like an effective tactic. No matter what the circumstances, don't resort to name-calling or bullying. The best way to make your case is through the ethical use of compelling facts and anecdotes that can be substantiated.

### **From Concept to Action**

Recall a time when you had the experience of a strongly positive communication climate, perhaps during a happy, special event or at an occasion when you received special recognition. How did that positive communication climate feel? What behaviors did others engage in that contributed to creating that positive climate? Going forward, what behaviors could you choose to express more often to help create positive climates for others?

**OER TEXT SOURCES:**

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