FINDING CLARITY:
PROFESSIONAL CIVILITY AND THE ART OF LISTENING IN EFFECTIVE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Personal success in the workplace and institutional success in the marketplace depend upon clear and effective communication among all organizational members. In the chaotic marketplace of ideas, products, and services, institutions and organization members often fight for attention at the expense of fostering effective relationships among stakeholders. Thus, *message* matters. A clear, concise, and reflective approach to constructing and embodying a message in an organization breaks down barriers to communication by ensuring that messages are received and heard in the crowded business marketplace. In such a marketplace, the act of *listening* to others and oneself allows one to compete in the crowded chaos through the construction of mindful messages.

Listening involves an *attunement toward* another in order to address the needs of others and to attend to the ground from which individuals speak.[1] In this essay, the move to address listening will be situated within a growing literature on professional civility, paying particular attention to Janie M. Harden Fritz's 2013 book, *Professional Civility: Communicative Virtue at Work*. Furthermore, this essay offers effective business communication strategy in both written and oral communication by addressing the "communication connection" with clients and the need for professional civility among organization members. The focus is on reinforcing good communication habits to accomplish both personal and organizational objectives. Communication breaks down when one disregards listening as an active communicative skill that requires both discernment and attention. At the end of the essay, we offer Adam Smith's work on sympathy, proximity, and the impartial spectator as a modern solution to the postmodern problem of the lack of professional civility in business communication.

The "Communication Connection" with Stakeholders

In the workplace, our communication is much more than simply talking: communicating in the workplace is about establishing communication connections with stakeholders, a group that includes clients, organization members, and publics. A person spends about 80 percent of his or her waking hours communicating,[2] and poor communication can cost an organization 25 to 40 percent of its annual budget.[3] Individuals often sort through a vast amount of competing messages in his or her head throughout any given day. Consider the last few moments of the workday. A coworker needs something. A deadline is soon approaching. A document needs to be printed before leaving the office. It is in these last moments that important communication among fellow coworkers, supervisors, and clients often occurs. With so much attention devoted to the details of the day and of the work that must be accomplished, does one truly stop and think about what is being communicated prior to sending those messages?

Enhancing performance, encouraging growth, and promoting success are only possible with and through solid communication skills. In the workplace, one must be an effective communicator in order to support and meet the organization's needs. By communicating effectively in the workplace, employees are supported in performing well, which enables the organization to reach success on projects. For example, a manager that communicates the importance of a project may enhance morale and enable an employee to perform to his or her fullest potential. Effective communication also encourages professional and organizational growth by building trust among those that protect and promote the institution. Thus, effective communication for an organization is like water for a tree: an organization is a cohesive unit, which prospers when it is cared for and attended to, resulting in the growth of employees and the enhancement of the organization itself. When everyone is on the same page, synergy arises, and organizational success is a constructive byproduct. One way to enhance performance, encourage growth, and promote success of the organization is by clarifying our messages with clients, generating communication connections.

Communication challenges, which call for clarity and responsiveness, often emerge when dealing with difficult clients. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), "Poor communication puts at risk 7.5 billion dollars in ROI [return on investment], lost time, [and] investing energy in projects only to see them not result in successful projects."[4] It is also estimated that 14 percent of each workweek is wasted as a result of poor communication.[5] Vague e-mails, for example, result in lost time when the focus of attention shifts to deciphering the message rather than getting the project done. Furthermore, a project may be completed in a manner that a supervisor did not want. The burden of responsibility falls to the receiver, who must then go back and fix the

project to the supervisor's standards. Ultimately, this illustrates the necessity of communication to accomplishing organizational objectives.

One must identify how communication is needed to attain organizational objectives aimed at gaining a profit (e.g., stakeholder alignments; defining key players in the project and the critical items/deliverables; defining the scope of the project and the purpose, contract negotiations, etc.). This identification helps to clarify a given message, which in turn contributes to a strong working relationship between the client and the organization, as well as alignment with stakeholders. For example, identification of potential project concerns opens opportunities for success by maintaining communication. In addition, one must define the scope of the project (e.g., the requisite time, resources, material, machinery, people, and cost, and other external factors that could affect these considerations). Often, the contract functions as a communicative device by which the terms and conditions of both the project and the project-related reporting are defined in terms of how much, how often, how detailed, etc.

Given the extent to which business communication impacts organizational life, culture, and success, why does clarifying organizational messages matter? The answer is found in acknowledging the importance of effective communication in the workplace. Communication is reflexive, like breathing, but can be cultivated through *reflective* practices. This makes effective communication in the workplace crucial to developing both internal relationships with employees and external relationships with clients. To understand the role communication plays in developing good client relationships, a few effective communication tips can be applied to workplace conversations, including engagement in active listening, the practice of respectful communication, and the use of appropriate nonverbal communication.

Listening in Business Communication

The extant literature in the field of communication claims listening as an integral part of the scholarly research that emerges from a wide variety of subfields (e.g., interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, business communication, philosophy of communication, etc.).[6] The practice of *listening* is an element of the human condition. The desire to be listened to is common to individuals from a variety of narrative backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. The workplace is a quintessential example of where and when to use "active listening."[7] Active listening, however, is not only about listening but also about showing, especially when understanding is crucial (for example, when a co-worker is in distress or a major decision for the organization must be made). Active listening involves giving appropriate and clear verbal and nonverbal cues to another person. When engaging in active listening, a person reflects and/or clarifies. Karen Wegela points out that one can foster strong listening skills by applying basic listening skills to a conversation. These skills

include the following: (1) paying attention, (2) paraphrasing ("It's like ... "), (3) reflecting feelings ("It sounds like you are ... "), (4) summarizing ("I see. The point is ... ?"), and (5) repeating/clarifying ("I don't understand ... ").[8] Moreover, Wegela calls attention to the importance of the receiver being able to discern whether someone is listening as a "technique" or as an "art."[9] For instance, the boss that uses active listening as a technique will demonstrate a pattern of failing to take action on the concerns discussed. Authenticity is the vital component to such discernment.

Giambattista Vico notes that the authentic listener is the "sage," or the wise person. A wise person is the best listener because he or she listens for, and is not listening to.[10] The wise person has learned the conversational skill of asking good questions well; to ask open ended questions—what and how (about now)—and closed questions—can, will, and do (is/are)—will depend upon the people involved and the context. However, being a good listener also means knowing when *not* to listen. Simply because someone speaks, one is not obliged to listen. Even choosing to listen means taking a moral stand.[11] Using active listening, then, signifies involvement and attentiveness, which communicates that the listener is interested in what the speaker has to say.

In addition to active listening, one must also practice respectful communication in the workplace. Respect *must* occur between all individuals involved in a given communication. Thus, one must take time to construct a message and should consider word choice. Linnda Durre notes the worst words to use in the workplace: "try ... well, I'll try;" "whatever ... used to dismiss a person;" "maybe and I don't know ... used to avoid making a decision;" "I will get back to you ... said to buy time or avoid revealing status [typically, the person never does get back to you];" "If ... people who use *if* are usually playing the blame game and betting against themselves;" "yes, but ... this person does not really want answers;" "I guess ... this phrase is typically only muttered when people half agree with you, but want to leave enough leeway to say, 'Well, I didn't really know. ... I was only guessing;'" and "we'll see ... a way to buy time, avoid a fight or confrontation or really saying no."[12] When questions are asked, a person must think about how he or she is to respond appropriately in order to effectively communicate and thus break through barriers of communication. In business communication, demonstrating interest invites continued communication, suggesting a desire to learn more and thus offering respect toward another person.

Finally, one must discern when the use of nonverbal communication is appropriate. Often, communication and *understanding* occurs not just through our words but through tone and body language. According to Sarah Trenholm and Arthur Jensen, nonverbal communication carries up to 93 percent of meaning in a conversation, tone of voice carrying the greatest amount of influence, holding at least 38 percent of meaning.[13] Discerning the appropriate use of nonverbal communication is accomplished through the application

of the "tens" method to the conversation. "Tens" stands for *touch* (i.e., handshake), *eye contact* (i.e., attempt when first meeting someone to note what color eyes they have, and in doing so you will always make good eye contact in your first impression), *name*, and *smile*. The advantages of practicing effective business communication are increased knowledge and skills, diversified views, acceptance of solutions, and high performance levels. The difficult task is transferring knowledge.

Transferring Knowledge Through Communication

Clarifying a message is essential to effectively and efficiently transferring knowledge. An approach to effective clarification is the STAR(R) method, which seeks to clarify the *situation* (context), the *tasks* assigned as part of the process, the *actions* to be taken that will lead to this outcome, the *results* that are going to occur, and if necessary, any *recommendations*. Applying this approach in a conversation invites the following: discussions of new projects (or situations); opportunities to provide services or to identify new opportunities for expansion (tasks); clarification of contracts, deliverables, team members, and responsibilities (actions); formulations of cohesive plans (results); and implementation of plans with an understanding that changes may occur as the project develops (recommendations). An employee, when face-to-face with a client, can think about using the STAR(R) method in order to communicate. The communication goal is to break the content down in such a way that it is easy to assimilate but also meets the client's communication needs.

Written communication is no less important, as an organizational record of exchanges between employees and clients emerges out of such communicative avenues. There are many ways that written communication factors into workplace communication: e-mails, letters, memos, reports, etc. In an age of rapid technological change, recognizing differences between types of messages—for example, a text message and an e-mail—is important in order to present a professional image, both personally and organizationally. To get a sense of how people communicate in the workplace, recognizing generational differences can make all the difference.

In order to communicate effectively, whether one is a leader, a manager, or a partner in an organization, he or she must have a baseline of knowledge about the values of different generations. For the first time in history, there are four generations in the workplace. Half of today's workforce is comprised of generation X'ers and millennials.[14] The other half consists of 45 percent baby boomers and 5 percent traditionalists who have been tasked with mentoring the younger generations.[15] Consequently, intergenerational communication in the workplace is common. When differences in intergenerational communication in the workplace are recognized, a person will be able to communicate more effectively, support employees in performing well, and reach success on pro-

jects. Communicating in an intergenerational workplace is no doubt challenging. When seeking to connect and engage with colleagues from different generations, it helps to ask three basic questions: Who are they? Why are they different? And why are you, as a member of one generation, different from the other generations?[16] In order to communicate effectively in an intergenerational workplace, a person needs to understand each group and the values and beliefs shared.

Understanding the difference, for example, between the traditionalist (who prefers to be more formal in workplace communication, and whose actions tend to reflect what contributes to the good of the organization) and the millennial (who seeks a relaxed work environment and is motivated by taking actions associated with meeting professional goals) is imperative for successful communication in the workplace. Similarly, understanding the differences between the baby boomer (who appreciates being needed and is used to being evaluated on working well with others) and the generation X'er (who has a learned independence and self-reliance leading to a "do it your way" attitude) is just as necessary to effectively communicating.[17]

Recognizing the intergenerational gap in today's business world can open opportunities or create gaps with clients. To communicate effectively with a client from a different generation, one must attend to the social, political, and economic experiences that shaped the client's world. Employees who grew up without technology, or those who prefer not to use certain technologies, may assume that every communication channel is equally valuable for different messages. People can take things for granted in their message content and message delivery.

Clarifying the Message

Good communication practices must be used when engaging clients. If messages are not professional, the client may wonder why shortcuts are being taken. If a person is taking shortcuts with professional messages, are they also taking shortcuts on projects? Clarifying the message matters. Consider two client communication situations: e-mail and voicemail—a written and an oral form of communication in the workplace.

In today's marketplace, there is an average of 125 business e-mails sent and received each day.[18] Before sending an e-mail, ask yourself two questions: What do you want the client receiving the message *to do*? And *when* do you need the project completed? Applying effective e-mail basics—such as including a detailed subject line, reason for writing, expected actions, contact information, and message urgency level (i.e. checking the [!] box)—is all it takes to ensure that a message is clear and concise.[19] While these are the basics to writing an email, these practices are often neglected. However, attending to the basics is important to building client relationships.

Applying e-mail basics, such as adding a professional opening (i.e. "Dear" or "Hi," depending on formality) and including a person's name, establishes professional relationships. The sender should also display respect. Respect the other person's time—"time is money," you know.[20] As Karen Friedman suggests, hit the headline first.[21] She adds, "Think about what the single most important point is that you need to make, the central idea. If your computer died or the fire alarm went off, what would be the one thing they needed to hear?"[22] Demonstrating responsiveness by answering all questions and responding to e-mails promptly also helps build client relationships. If possible, e-mails should be answered within a 24-hour period. If the reply will take some thought, a "courteous" e-mail letting the sender know their message was received and a response will follow should be sent. An e-mail can build a communication connection with a client, but it is also important to consider whether the information relayed could affect the relationship with the client. If so, it may be worth a phone call.

In a similar manner to e-mails, studies show that 85 percent of the phone conversation is vocal, while only 15 percent is verbal.[23] This means that what a person says is important, but *how* he or she says it is critical to building a relationship with the client. Tone, attitude, and energy all matter when it comes to making a good impression on the phone.[24] All too often, we neglect to think through what we are going to say before we dial the phone. In leaving a message, state your full name, the organization you are with, and your phone number; leave a brief message, which includes the facts and the best time to reach you; repeat your full name, the organization you are with, and your phone number; and most importantly, speak clearly and slowly.[25] This information is not only important when leaving a message for a client but for leaving an internal message as well. For instance, if Marc leaves the following message for George: "This is Marc, I have a question give me a call back," George might not return Marc's call immediately because he may need to look up Marc's number. Or, if George is working remotely and does not have a contact list in front of him, Marc may have to wait until George is back in the office. Leaving a clear and concise voicemail is important to accurately express the information at hand, but it is also important to developing a relationship with a client.

Voicemails give a person the chance to reveal their personality—it is not just about the words you say, but all of you. Nonverbal communication should also be considered when leaving a voicemail. Considering tone of voice and smiling when leaving a voicemail is a good idea. Smiles may be unseen, but they are definitely heard and affect how a person speaks. Before making a call, doing research will also assist in relationship building by showing the depth of a person's understanding of an issue. According to a recent *Forbes* article, the "ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization ... obtain and process information ... and sell and influence others" are three of the top ten skills employers say they seek in employees.[26] Proving that you are

listening is also important to building client relationships. If a person is having a conversation with a client, and he or she is thinking about the next meeting or a deadline, he or she is not actively listening. The point is that communicating professionally with clients when sending an e-mail and leaving a voicemail will help a person develop the kind of relationships with clients they want to build. Yet, along with these business communication tips, strategies, and skills, which are needed for effective communication among stakeholders, listening is a vital part of attaining these professional ideals and maintaining important relationships in the marketplace.

Professional Civility

We now turn to professional civility, which lends theoretical clarity to our quest for clarity in the practice of business communication. Professional civility rests within responsiveness to organizational life and commitment to vocation, which is grounded within protecting and promoting the goods of productivity, place, and persons.[27] Commitment to professional civility involves *listening* to the self and to the other, recognizing that others inhabit the organization in the same manner that we do. Effective and sustainable institutions promote relationships among stakeholders that are not necessarily concerned with politeness, but rather with communicative virtue that maintains effective business communication in daily institutional life.

The professions have historically been characterized as occupations in which one dedicates their life to the good of the community and service to others. This "narrative of the professions carries with it an implied ethic of civility as a marker of professional identity."[28] This traditional commitment to civility introduces the goods that the professions protect and promote—those of productivity, place, and persons.[29] Within an organization committed to the protection of these goods, individuals are called to engage in civility from the framework of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments.* By identifying each of these goods as markers by which professional civility may emerge, one may see that Smith's conception of sympathy within close physical spaces and global exchanges becomes necessary in order for an organization to flourish and to succeed.

Productivity, as a good protected and promoted by an organization, includes a shared commitment to the task at hand. This is done through interaction and communicative engagement of the other in the scope of the shared task. In fact, Dennis Organ argues that organizational *citizenship* behavior is a task-focused "extra-role, and beyond the job" mentality that carries organizational citizens forward to attending to and caring for the institution."[30] Contributions to the work of others through encouragement and instrumental support move energy toward the focus of a shared project.[31] Performance within an organization is tied to the communicative environment in which one par-

ticipates. This environment is fostered through the civil interactions between employees, who focus upon the good of the organization or the shared task at hand. We are called to extend sympathy in this environment in order to maintain a level of productivity. Sympathy can be seen as "an ordinary social practice through which people in shared spaces produce morality together without the artifice of coercion, philosophy, religion, or formal education."[32] Producing morality together may emerge as a practice that is attentive to the need for focusing upon a common task. By protecting and promoting that task, individuals seek to protect and promote a common good. This may be done by recognizing situations and by extending civility and sympathy towards others, thereby permitting productivity not only for the self but for others as well.

Professional civility calls attention to the movement of ideas within the organization, which would not be possible without the moral communicative engagement between those involved. Holistically speaking, "Professional civility involves respect for others in the workplace and a willingness to work with those whom one may not like ... Ideas, not the individual, propel professional civility in an organization."[33] One does not have to engage in a friendship or like everyone that he or she is working with. The professions protect and promote productivity, which permits human accomplishment—and therefore, happiness—to flourish. This is done through respect and tolerance for others who also care about the ideas that propel an organization.

Environments are shaped through communicative engagement. In fact, "professionals shape the setting within which productive work is accomplished through communicative interaction, which structures the organization's environment ... For this reason, ordinary unremarkable contexts of institutional life become generators of organizational environments through communicative habits."[34] This is contextualized within the idea of a physical organization in which direct human interaction creates an environment for individuals to flourish. One may find that "the face-to-face encounters that characterize co-located settings are less available for remote employees and their colleagues but are nevertheless important for developing common ground and building interpersonal bonds."[35] This brings into question the idea of the lack of physical proximity that has been discussed through Adam Smith's notions of sympathy and proximity. In today's global marketplace, the organizational home may exist across oceans, borders, and nations. In this situation, one must pay attention to the other goods that are protected and promoted. Productivity and persons exist as common ground in which any employee may participate. Working toward a common task calls forth a certain level of similarity, even in the face of difference. We therefore may be called to engage in sympathy, even when outside of physical proximity with others, through the use of description as well as respect for the task at hand.

The good of persons within the professions most seriously embodies the need for civility and sympathy within the organization. "Professional civility

protects and promotes persons in the workplace through communicative practices that permit the closeness and distance necessary to function within organizational roles on behalf of productivity."[36] This is most seriously violated during the process of labeling another individual as a "difficult other," during which an individual denies the other any extension of sympathy or civility, and places judgment about another without analyzing any situational factors. Within the organization, "labeling a person as difficult is a social construction leading those creating the label to believe that the difficulty is an intrinsic characteristic of the person."[37] However, situational factors such as incompatible relationships between persons, roles, and organizations may cause an individual to act in a way that is problematic within the situation.[38] Situational factors must be taken seriously.

Case Study: Civility and the Scottish Enlightenment

At the midpoint of the eighteenth century, Scotland was in turmoil.[39] Unexpectedly, from uncivil politics, an unstable economy, and unclean living conditions there emerged a surge of creativity that continues to impact modern civilization.[40] Guided by the spirit of Francis Bacon, thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith "reported the regularities of social life as they really were," in fragments, without the benefit of retrospection.[41] They brought philosophy from the ideal world of Plato's Forms and Hegel's Sprit to the "mud of everyday life,"[42] and offered answers to questions asked by starving Scots. In response to the demands of their historical moment in Scotland, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment proposed civility as a remedy to many of the issues that plagued their country.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Scotland was "perched on the precipice of economic disaster," devastated by a 1699 depression in the Scottish colony of Darien in Panama.[43] At the same time, military conflicts between England and France severely limited trading options for Scotland. Tensions grew between England and Scotland in the first decade of the eighteenth century until the 1707 Act of Union unified the nations of England and Scotland and moved the centralized government of the United Kingdom from Scotland to England.[44] The Act of Union relieved pressure on the Scottish economy, which regained strength in the latter half of the eighteenth century. On the heels of these political and economic shifts, the culture of Scotland began to shift as well. Two years after the Act of Union, the Edinburgh Town Council required that professors specialize in specific subjects, a reform which emphasized individual experience over educational community.[45]

The Scottish Enlightenment started with a few thinkers in Scotland and spread to the whole of Western civilization through the teaching of civility.[46] Prior to the Scottish Enlightenment, the Scottish educational system was united in producing a community of "patriotic, public-spirited gentlemen."[47] With the

political and economic shifts that led to the Act of Union, the focus of education shifted from community to the "internalized concerns of civility."[48] Unlike community, which took a blow when the government of the United Kingdom moved to London, civility offered practical solutions to Scotland's problems on the level of lived experience.

Alexander Broadie identifies two goals of the Scottish Enlightenment, each responsive to the historical moment of eighteenth century Scotland. First, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment framed education as an individual endeavor. The pursuit of knowledge was up to the pursuer rather than any authority or received tradition.[49] The Scottish Enlightenment was skeptical of authority and cited the collapse of Scotland's colony, wars with France and England, and reconfiguration of the United Kingdom as evidence of the failure of community. Instead of relying on others, the Scottish Enlightenment called people to think for themselves. Second, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment preached academic tolerance and freedom. In a civil society, they argued, anybody should be able to pursue and contribute ideas without fear of persecution.[50] In both cases, Scotland would become a civil storehouse for ideas, bounded by the limits of the economic reality of the country. Through civility, the boundaries of the storehouse would grow, and the economy would follow.

For the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, the growth of the individual intellect would guide the recovery of the economy. Intellect would grow when watered with civility. The sentiment that to "determine the answer to a question we go and look for ourselves" was the foundation of an educational strategy to civilize every individual in Scotland.[51] For Smith, the question of how to live in a new Scotland was answerable by a "science of mind," attentive to the reality of lived experience and limits of the historical moment.[52] Smith's work offers a response to the historical moment of the late eighteenth century within the limits of his science of morality. In his most famous book, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that economic growth is the result of free competition guided by the natural laws and "invisible hand" of the market.[53] A decade earlier, in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith asked the question of the Scottish Enlightenment: Under what conditions do civility and self-interest come into phase? In response, he proposed a theory of sympathy, where self-interested individuals "act with complete 'propriety,' in the proximity of a third, 'impartial spectator.'"[54] Smith's metaphors of *sympathy, proximity,* and *impartial spectator* illustrate the responsiveness of professional civility to historical contingency.

Sympathy

The metaphor of sympathy was central to both David Hume and Adam Smith. Hume's understanding of sympathy is close to colloquial understand-

ings of empathy, or identification with another's emotional state of mind.[55] For Hume, sympathy extends from an observer, who infers feelings from witnessed behavior and imagines the observed's state of mind.[56] Humean sympathy originates in an observer and never leaves the observer. For Smith, sympathy also extends from an observer, but, unlike in Hume, sympathy in Smith involves a projection of the self in an attempt to understand the other person's feelings *as* the other person. To be sympathetic, one "projects" oneself into the situation of another, and then imagines one's own feelings in the same situation from the other's perspective.[57] Stephen Darwall characterizes sympathy in Hume as "emotional contagion" and in Smith as "projective empathy."[58] As emotional contagion, sympathy "catches" another's emotional state without the projection of the imagination.[59] As projective empathy, sympathy imagines the self in another's position and shares the other's feelings out of concern for his or her well-being.[60]

Smith's understanding of sympathy emerges out of incivility in Scotland. In *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith situates sympathy within the social milieu of eighteenth century Scotland and then extends sympathy to all civilized human beings, who co-construct sympathy through civil communication.[61] Sympathy makes possible a culture of civility which, in turn, maintains a store of sympathy in each individual. In judging the morality of others from their own perspectives, one momentarily shares their feelings and understands their motivations, "even for just a moment."[62] Sympathy replicates another's feelings by imagining oneself as the other and then returning to oneself to judge one's own actions. Smith calls self-interested individuals to share the sentiments of others. Professional civility responds to fragmentation in postmodernity by recombining the fragments of modernity's metanarrative of progress into many mini-narratives in pursuit of particular goals. Likewise, sympathy forms a "mesh of mutual emotional connections" that held together the fragments of community lost to London after the Act of Union.[63]

Impartial Spectator

For Smith, sympathy as an imaginary projection of the self becomes possible in light of a third, impartial spectator. The impartial spectator is a "well-informed but disinterested ... imaginary observer" that checks self-interested behavior.[64] The impartial spectator sets the standard for right and wrong, so that individuals can be civil and self-interested at the same time. Among individuals acting in their own self-interest, the impartial spectator provides corrective common ground for moral behavior: "The heart of every impartial spectator rejects all fellow feelings with the selfishness of his motives, and he is the proper object of the highest disapprobation."[65] Unlike Kant's categorical imperative—the principle that individuals should act only when they can will that the action become a universal law imposed as a universal standard—Smith's

impartial spectator is a universal standard for individual behavior. The impartial spectator offers a benchmark that individuals can aspire to attain in their self-interest. The impartial spectator moves between individual and universal, calling individuals to assume the state of mind of other individuals for the good of universal morality.

Smith's impartial spectator has entered the Western cultural lexicon as a standard of judgment for individual behavior. For instance, in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman echoes Smith in his own definition of the self as a performative agent of communication. When an individual "performs" himself, he imagines a "non-present audience for his activity."[66] Even if the individual does not share the standard of the impartial spectator, he brings his own behavior into phase with the standard "because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards."[67] For Smith, the impartial spectator is not punitive, always opening possibilities for the self-referential imagination.[68] Out of sympathy, individuals imagine how they *should* feel in another's situation and then extend civility based on their shared self-interest. Smith's theory of sympathy calls self-interested individuals to imagine another's perspective in light of an impartial spectator based on witnessed behavior. However, the question remains: Can there be sympathy without witnessed behavior or physical proximity?

Proximity

For Smith, sympathy starts when an individual witnesses another individual's behavior and infers the other's emotional state of mind. The individual then imagines himself as the other and based on shared sentiments, makes judgments "of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love."[69] To describe the relationship between proximity and sympathy in Smith, we return again to David Hume, who observed that the smaller the physical space between individuals, the larger the capacity for sympathy.[70] However, Hume asked, does sympathy make sense when two individuals are not contiguous in space or time? Neither Hume nor Smith has much to say on this point, but both locate general standards of sympathy in "social intercourse" and "general usefulness."[71]

The general usefulness of sympathy comes from consideration of the details of specific situations. With the details of specific situations, one imagines oneself in the same situations through social intercourse. Through social intercourse, individuals become "spectators of each other," who collect details that inform their imaginations.[72] For Smith, judgments are always embedded in social contexts and informed by social intercourse. Proximity supplies the details of social intercourse that keep imagination tied to reality. Smith's understanding of proximity in relation to sympathy is akin to Kant's distinction

between imagination and fantasy. While imagination pushes off something real and works with the raw materials of everyday life, fantasy invents possibilities *ex nihlio* with no apparent connection to reality. Smith grounds sympathy in the raw materials of everyday life, observable in social intercourse. The general usefulness of sympathy implies proximity to the object of sympathy as well as to the home of the human condition in lived experience.

For Smith, too, sympathy is "an act of surveillance in a closed physical space that exerts a certain kind of disciplinary power over those being watched."[73] When watching others, one becomes aware of being watched by other people in proximity to oneself and by an impartial spectator who oversees the social intercourse. Smith's impartial spectator is by nature engaged in proximate surveillance. The impartial spectator surveys individuals, who themselves survey other individuals in a "sort of social 'quarantine.'"[74] Proximity is central to Smith's theory of sympathy, which relies on inferences drawn from witnessed behavior.[75] In Smith's theory of sympathy, proximity provides clarity for making moral judgments. Only with proximity can one discern details that inform the imagination. However, in postmodernity meaning emerges from distance, not proximity.[76] While modernity imposes proximity in the name of progress, postmodernity affirms distance as a good of the postmodern condition. For Arnett, Fritz, and Bell, distance provides the clarity for moral judgment. In proximity, "details fade and blur together," misinforming the imagination.[77] Professional civility looks for details in distance, where the clarity of distance opens one's eyes to the details missed in proximity.[78]

Sympathy and Professional Civility

For Smith, sympathy is a response to someone else's situation, informed by the imagination. The imagination pushes off reality, that is, the detailed observations made about others in social intercourse. Individuals witness others' behavior and then infer their emotional state and imagine themselves in the same situation. Likewise, civility calls individuals to respond to others within the limits of the historical moment. In a historical moment characterized by narrative and virtue contention, civility demands thoughtful and respectful engagement with others and the goods they protect and promote. Civility is not only "politeness, manners, and etiquette, ... the behavior found in royal courts," but also a call to engage lived experience on its own terms, without a single or best answer to the questions of a historical moment.[79]

Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment bore witness to civility's call. As a communicative virtue, civility situates Smith's theory of sympathy within a broader conversation of communication ethics. Within a postmodern marketplace, the modern metaphors of sympathy, proximity, and impartial spectator inform organizational practices in service of a common good: the organization. Organizations are spaces for social intercourse, where individuals collect details for the imagi-

nation. Through their imaginations, individuals extend sympathy for the good of the organizational home and its stated mission. The mission of an organization protects and promotes both professions and the human telos within the boundaries of public and private and limits of the historical moment. Professional civility responds to lived experience from an open stance of attentive care.

In postmodernity, sympathy may be self-serving, but

> even though we may originally engage in sympathy in order to gain sympathy from others, we also gain self-restraint, by expressing ourselves properly, and benevolence, by extending sympathy to others. As in the market, the economy of the passions can be smoothly adjusted to produce order. Thus, sympathy creates civility.[80]

Civility also creates sympathy, as evidenced by Smith's impartial spectator. Civility tethers sympathy to an organizational home, so that sympathy never strays too far from the common good. Civility informs sympathy under the watchful eye of the impartial spectator, the "tribunal or judge" who provides "our senses of duty or moral obligation, of dereliction, and shame."[81] In service of professional civility, the impartial spectator enforces the mission of an organization and guards the boundaries of public and private.

Under the watchful eye of the impartial spectator, professional civility protects and promotes the human telos through the communicative praxis of sympathy. As communicative praxis, the theory of civility informs the practice of sympathy and vice versa. The impartial spectator redirects an individual's "quest for wealth, power, and fame" toward the common good of the organizational home.[82] Robert Nozick continues, " ... without proper moral sentiments and institutions of justice to harness and control individual behaviors, the instincts [toward wealth, power, and fame] will not always generate the best outcomes for society."[83] Professional civility opens opportunities for people to pursue the best outcomes for an organization. Professional civility holds people accountable to the organization, the organization accountable to society, and the society to the historical moment, all guided by a silent impartial spectator.[84]

Along with imagination, emotion, and reason, sympathy is a hard-wired building block of the human moral conscience.[85] Postmodernity overwhelms the moral conscience with difference and makes it choose among competing goods, all of which may be different than one's own beliefs. Professional civility ensures that the human telos in postmodernity is not stopped or sacrificed to routine cynicism or existential angst. Through sympathy informed by professional civility, people in postmodernity can get things done despite fundamental disagreements. Professional civility rebuilds the rubble of modernity with openness to difference in service of petite narratives or specific organizational missions.[86] In the eighteenth century, Smith made proximity a prerequisite for sympathy. In the twenty-first century, as new communication technologies

transport faraway suffering into the living rooms of remote spectators, professional civility affirms difference of the common good of postmodernity.[87]

People in postmodernity and eighteenth century Scotland asked the same question: How can we get along amid so much chaos? Smith proposed proximate sympathy within a science of mind. Fritz and others propose professional civility, informed by sympathy but attentive to lived experience of distance and difference.[88] Both sympathy and civility are "fitting responses" to their historical moments.[89] For Calvin O. Schrag, "The language of morality is the language of responsiveness and responsibility, and if there is to be a talk of 'an ethics' in all this it will need to be an ethics of the fitting response."[90] Sympathy was Smith's fitting response to eighteenth century Scotland, which continues to shape a postmodern world. Professional civility is a fitting response to a postmodern world, informed by Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment.

Listening, Civility, and Effective Business Communication

Clarity in effective business communication is dependent upon an individual's ability to listen in a postmodern moment of a chaotic marketplace. Attending to the other in a given communicative encounter requires all parties involved to engage in professional civility—to respond to the moment in a manner that is considerate of the demands being placed upon each individual. Focusing on reinforcing good communication habits to accomplish both personal and organizational objectives builds communication connections with all stakeholders involved in an institution. People help build an organization's brand through reflective and responsible communication that emerges from both the practice of discourse and the art of listening. Effective business communication is dependent upon both the language that we choose and the civility we enact. Addressing the needs, opinions, and thoughts of a stakeholder in a clear and concise manner requires an individual to reflect and to respond—to actively listen to the other in a communicative exchange, distilling order and meaning from the chaos. This essay has turned to Adam Smith's theoretical framework on sympathy as a response to a chaotic historical moment, filled with change, that conceptualized civility as the very ground from which we could communicate. Importantly, in this postmodern moment, the ability to clarify, to listen, and to respond breaks the barriers to effective business communication, maintaining an ethical and responsible marketplace.

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