

## The Path to Great Communication

*A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Proverbs 17:9*

What do Pope Francis, Oprah Winfrey, and President Reagan have in common? They are often cited as great communicators. In every walk of life, the ability to communicate is the difference between being effective in one's role and simply muddling through the obstacles and pitfalls of life.

Parents often ask about their child's ability to communicate. This is because in the college admission's process, the interview can be a crucial hoop through which a student needs to successfully navigate. However, through years of experience, it has become evident to me that the ability to talk to people is a skill best learned through repeated experience. This is even more crucial as not everyone is born an extrovert and has the innate ability to sit down and chat with strangers who will play a part in the decision whether that student should be admitted to their school or not. In Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, he asserts that it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert at a task. Does it take 10,000 hours to be a great communicator? Probably. This is why, as a parent who wants to prepare their child for the arduous path of life, communication skills must be built early and reinforced often.

Here are some easy exercises to start enhancing communication skills. These activities may be as beneficial to preschoolers as they are to high school students:

- Allow your child to order at restaurants. For some naturally shy children, have them practice with you before the waiter or waitress arrives at your table.
- Have young readers read you a favorite story. Encourage your child to use different voices for characters. This kind of play-acting is great fun and it teaches the value of expression.
- Create fun, family talent shows. This gives your child an opportunity to introduce his act to a friendly audience. Make all members of the audience participate. It creates a team of people all engaged in the same goal of putting on a show.

- Encourage your child to give directions. This is an especially effective job for middle school students. Have him give you directions to a favorite destination (like the nearest frozen yogurt store) and take your child there. The treat will taste especially good if your child played a role in getting to the desired place.
- Encourage your child to take part in activities that promote strong communication in and out of school. At Aquinas there are activities such as: lecturing at Mass, reading the morning announcements, participating in sports, presenting tasks at Boy Scouts, engaging in debates and Model UN activities, performing in the annual Shakespeare contest, participating in Student Government, and acting in the school dramas. In addition, encourage your student to help new students as they are acclimating to Aquinas. This act of charity may be as simple as giving directions to a room or explaining the lunch procedure, but it helps your student's communication as it helps a new student feel more comfortable.
- High school students should start to read the newspaper. The newspaper can be whatever your family chooses; *The Tribune Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or *The Pittsburgh Catholic* all work as options. A student needs to have an idea of what is going on in the world. Use dinner as a timely place to ask your child what he thinks of these events. For instance, I had a student tell me about an interview in which he was asked why President Obama cancelled his meeting with the head of Russia. Fortunately, he knew the answer, but it would have been an uncomfortable few moments if he had been unaware of the situation.
- Finally, encourage your child to talk to his teachers. If he has questions, comments, or concerns, really encourage him to approach the teacher. Again, if your child is shy, try role-playing the conversation at home. This can give your child the opportunity to formulate his words in advance. Though this idea of approaching one's teacher can be a little scary for students, it is a skill that will be a life-long gift.

Remember, the best way to foster any skill in your child is to make it fun. Studies show that communication skills are vital in the information age. In

my experience, effective interviewing (with great eye contact!) has made all the difference for our students with stretch schools. It does not matter to which vocation one is called; speaking effectively makes every situation proceed more smoothly. This advantage becomes increasingly important throughout one's career. The investment in this skill is free and the payoff is immeasurable!

For more information try these websites:

[www.dalecarnegie.com](http://www.dalecarnegie.com)

[www.artofeloquence.com](http://www.artofeloquence.com)

[www.cnbc.com/id/100928074](http://www.cnbc.com/id/100928074)

[www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle](http://www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle)