

What did I Say? What did I Mean? What did they hear?
Creating Effective Communication with any Species
Liha-L-Ligo (not a Hawaiian cocktail)
By Maureen Ross, MA, June 2011

Staying connected has taken on a whole meaning *and challenges*. Our use of technology – email, cell, texting - will never replace the value of a live connection or hug, but it can have positive benefits.

Still noticing a fear about technology with yourself or others, but wondering if the fear is about learning or because it takes away from “live” connection? Me too, and I think it’s a combination of both, colored with the real reason why (and only you can answer this) we hesitate. It is a balancing act. Using Liha-L-Ligo can help. It is not a Hawaiian cocktail, although I’d probably make a fortune if I marketed it as one. Don’t bother trying to book the .com, I already did! I discovered a while ago that if something keeps woofing at me at 3:00am - book it. I got 30% off too. I’m not going to tell you yet what Liha-L-Ligo is because if I did, you would stop reading.

Effective communications is a universal skill, whether at work, home, in-person or on the Internet. Communicating messages to our dogs is like emailing. To be effective, we have to clearly get the message across. Even that doesn’t work all the time, depending on what kind of day the receiver is having. Oftentimes, the response is not what we want or expected. Very often, avoidance is the key factor for not communicating effectively, because we don’t want to change the status quo ([homeostasis](#)). Let’s explore this in a nutshell, not Wi-Fi because Wi-Fi isn’t going to help you out of a communication snafu, when you get and/or send a “snarky” email or message.

Awaken your brain cells. Learning anything new can do this, so capture several minutes every day to practice effective emailing and/or teaching your dog a new behavior. [Brains](#) need stimulation to continue growing cells. Otherwise, the old saying, “use it or lose it” resonates loud and clear!

Uniqueness – As unique individuals, we learn in different ways (audio, visual, and performance-doing). If you are communicating with any species, or moving to other parts of the country, technology can be a friend! Knowledge is empowering. At work, it can enhance your career and how others perceive you and your abilities. Seldom is someone promoted for handing in a 48 page handwritten project forecast or 2000 page manuscript (flash drives, DVD’s, PDF and Acrobat come to mind) to an acquisitions editor. Mine would “hit” delete.

Try this exercise: Make a list of your accomplishments and add a note to each one about why you think they worked and how you felt about it. Take a deep breath; give yourself and your dog a hug. It is okay to take credit for a job well done whether a big money-making contract, grocery shopping or planting a seed. We reap what we sow, sometimes now, but more often later. This list proves that you have been doing things you love and enjoy. If your list is barren, then you know where and when to begin – NOW. ***Was becoming a more effective communicator on the list?*** Keep reading, as boring as it seems, because there is one thing that will prevail, effective communication.

What is Communication? Communication is the process of exchanging intended information that is conveyed through written and spoken words, tones of voice, and body language according to a common set of rules. To be effective, one must be aware of these rules, with the species they are communicating to and the approach they are using! Effective communication is a two-way process involving reception and transmission of information that includes *hearing and listening*. This implies that one verifies that the receiver has understood the message that was intended and a subsequent response is noted. With a successful exchange of information, the sender and receiver will have a common set of symbols, words or cues that they attach similar meaning to throughout the encoding, transmission, and decoding of an intended message. With dogs, it’s simple. You ask them to do this, for that, and you know if they get it by them doing it or not, and in the timeframe you expected, right? How about children, partners, relatives, bosses and friends? I think dogs are easier to train, but I’m going off-track. Let’s stay focused.

What is [Email](#) Communication? **Electronic mail** is a method of exchanging digital messages from an author to one or more recipients. Modern email operates across the Internet or other computer networks. Today’s email systems are based on a store and forward model. Email servers accept, forward, deliver and store messages. Neither the users nor their computers are required to be online simultaneously; only **connect briefly**, typically to an email server for as long as it takes to send or receive messages **instantly**. An email message consists of a message

envelope, the message *header* and the message *body*. So far so good? This is straight-forward, instant and BORING. The message header contains control information (you can control anything if the person who you are slamming isn't right in front of you), including an originator's email (or someone in Siberia) and one or more recipient addresses (in five other undiscovered countries). Usually descriptive information is added, such as a subject header field and a message submission date/time stamp (which says we know when you GOT IT, and whether you OPENED it or NOT). These days, we can use BIG email servers to send LOTS of emails to MILLIONS of people. Cool, but who cares if it isn't serving our goals or needs? I enjoy Facebook, but Facebook does not pay the bills. Is everyone but me independently wealthy?

Compare Communication and Email (without my snarky remarks): Notice the biggest difference. It is the *hearing, listening, observing and responding in person*. You can see, read and connect with Emails. It is missing body language, listening, expression and a way to defend yourself in person if necessary. People can be very courageous on emails, but in person, wilt like a severely under watered Lily. **Emailing can leave a lot of wiggle room for misinterpretation.** That's why effectively communication skills are important for emails too!

As intuitive, knowledgeable, experienced caregivers, educators, managers, health care professionals, parents and pet lovers (is that still politically correct – whatever) we have the ability to teach and share our experience with others. If you aren't sure about a message, rather than wilting or getting defensive, asking for clarity will lead the way. Engaging and disengaging more effectively online requires a interpretation savvy. My mother use to say (and she didn't even drive a car): "if you aren't sure, ask, and if you still aren't sure, it's probably not worth worrying about. It's there problem."

Who are you talking to? What are your goals / intentions? How soon do you want an answer? I enjoy the internet as a resource for acquiring knowledge and gaming, but not as a deity or buffer for not dealing with issues at hand. I get excited, not overwhelmed striving to get the whole picture. Unfortunately, we can't always get that from everyone, everyday, so we have to negotiate an acceptable alternative / balance / in-between. Managing two small businesses and being a writer, I value the "speed" at which things can be accomplished online. I email and answer myself, not because I'm crazy, but as a tool to read what I've sent. Being a counselor I'm a fan of narrative and journaling. It can resolve a lot of issues. Sometimes I shock myself. Do you? That's a good thing. You know you are alive when you admit to having many sides to yourself because we all do, some more colorful than others.

Emailing, Emotions and Embarrassment! If you just once accidentally hit the send key, while seething in anger, calling someone a PITA (pain-in-the-ass), a DS (dumb-\$\$!#) or worse - you get the picture. Gratefully the few times this has happened, the receiver's computer had broken down and all emails were lost. Thank you to the spirit who was on duty that day. Once, a good friend said, "I don't think I was supposed to get this, but let's talk." We resolved a lot of pent up emotion, having been too fearful or kind to say what we really wanted. I don't advise this on email, before carefully considering who you are talking too, what your goals are, what you are trying to convey and is it immediate, from anger. Always take a few deep breaths before responding on email. Angry emails are hard to forgive, plus they can be saved for future reference. ***Liha-L-Ligo. That cocktail again. Don't scan forward, just take a breath. You'll get there soon enough. Be patient.***

Emotional purge, then Practice your goals on a separate word document or Notebook. Create a script especially if goals or emotions are involved - read it as if you are the receiver - take a deep breath - ask yourself, "if this were me receiving this, does it make sense, and will it make sense to the receiver? Is it stating my goals, win-win solutions, deadlines, or only problems / babblings?

Whether on the internet, phone, face to face or with a different species, communication can only be effective if it clearly conveys our message and in a language that the other party understands.

Engage / Disengage: How hot is this or is it about hot spots? Are you going for a promotion, interviewing for a job, trying to get your dog to stop jumping, organizing a birthday party or want to know if think you'll look good in red? Engaging the receiver in the first paragraph with content. State your intentions, letting them know what you expect from them. Disengage with the same criteria (deadline dates, expectations, follow-up, and A.B.C priorities).

Save "A" priority emails: If emails are pertaining to business related functions, workshops, meetings, project deadlines, weddings or a dog conference, SAVE THEM. Then you have CYA (covered your ass).

We don't go to the grocery store for a hammer and nails or the hardware store for milk! Keeping our goals and emotions in check when communicating is beneficial. What is your goal, what are you trying to say, and are you sending it to the right people to get the response / result you want? *Sending Oprah an email saying you want to change the world is gloriously commendable, but you will receive an auto-reply saying "thank you, if you want to subscribe to "O" magazine, click here."*

Keep it short, sweet and succinct: I know this for sure: sending a scroll that runs on like a free flowing roll of toilet paper, will get deleted and/or put in read later file, then recycle bin. I like to write a LOT, but I try to keep the important stuff up-front, keep them intrigued, and then finish with a bang.

Love Ya (LY) !?! Depends on who you are talking too! Sending text messages with abbreviations can be helpful, others suspecting, and some warrant a sock in the kisser. LOL does not belong on office emails, whether it means lots of laughs, lots of love or liha-l-ligo. When communicating in the business world or with friends, it is a good idea to know whether the receiving party will understand what LOL or PITA means. Is it appropriate? Do NOT use abbreviations in business emails, unless you are very familiar with the person receiving them. Do NOT sign off with "love ya", unless it's personal.

Exploration / Transition: My background is in organizational management, psychology and behavior (dogs and humans). I learned how to type on an IBM Selectric. I thought that was cool. While the other executive assistants were having panic attacks, I was grinning from ear-to-ear. I use to win typing contests in high school. When the first PC landed on my desk, it was more challenging because of the DICTAPHONE attached to my head. My boss was the head of Research Development, an engineer, didn't talk loud enough and twirled his very long mustache. I believe he had it stuck in his mouth when dictating. Not only was this hygienically hazardous to his well-being, but it put a serious damper on my speed. I could anti-bacterial wipe the Dictaphone. I had to replay everything 3X to decipher his gibberish. After replacing his Dictaphone 2X, I told him I thought "it was broken", we had a serious talk. He was fine. He had no idea he talked that way, because he didn't listen to himself. I was fired (kidding). I was promoted (true story). Liha-L-Ligo. Take a sip.

*Practice and prevention -- you can do it! Consider scripting an email before hitting send.
Have your dog sit, before lunging out the door, leaving you and the laundry in mid-air.*

Seek and enjoy the transition / thrill: I look at communicating as an opportunity to awaken the brain and overcome fear of transition. One thing is for sure, with life comes changes.

Effective Communication, Emailing and Getting the Dog to Sit in a Nutshell

Foundations for Communication

1. Awareness = knowledge = empowerment
2. State what you need directly and clearly.
3. Request, respect, reward appropriately.
4. Empathetic listening (what's the other being feeling, thinking).
5. Don't interrupt, but do ask for time to speak w/o interruption.
6. Clarifying (asking questions) can seed an idea. Offer suggestions in a non-threatening way.
7. Paraphrase the message in your own words or theirs to be sure you get it correctly ...
8. Reflect: "I know you are on board, but it sounds like you have some frustration with the decision. Care to discuss it?"
9. Emotional Component: listening and looking for verbal and nonverbal cues - voice tone and volume, facial and bodily gestures, eye contact and physical distance - will facilitate more accurate reflection.
10. Summarize and give feedback – Too much information might overwhelm a receiver. Not enough could leave them confused. Feedback should be timely and non-judgmental.
11. Mirroring - Direct conversation is not always possible unless the other party is willing to listen. Mirroring their behavior sometimes works. They cross their arms, you cross yours.

Emailing – Capture

1. Breathe, Plan – Capture them with a meaningful subject line, clarify the goal, what you are saying, your intentions.
2. Be professional, even with friendly emails, clearly stating who is getting the email, or if not, why it is confidential. Using BCC is fine, when explained. Otherwise, it pisses people off! Is that the goal?
3. Be kind — don't flame, but do express yourself if this is the 2nd or 3rd request.
4. Proofread or spell check before you send. Auto spell helps, but don't worry about it. A clear message is more important. Errors are everywhere. Anyone more focused on your spelling, probably has bigger issues than you need to get involved with.
5. Don't assume privacy. Anyone can forward.
6. Distinguish between formal and informal situations.
7. Respond Promptly.
8. Show Respect, Restraint, Savvy and Integrity. Your character can shine through e-mail, and if you burn bridges here, be aware that the receiver can burn a few too.
9. Mirroring: Your tone can parrot-type theirs.

Dogs are simple; they give you what you teach: Dogs, considering history, environment, genetics and some breed specific traits, will give you what you request. Communicating with them is different. You can't speak English; you have to merge it with Dog. For dogs, this means body language, cues, training and positive associations. For more about **uncomplicated dog training**, journey to [Dog Talk](#). Check out [The Learning Zone](#).

Are you punishing while communicating, emailing or with your dog? Punishment is variable. You can punish someone by not responding to emails, saying the "dog" ate them which no-one believes, or by leaving a puppy that was chomping on your ankle in the middle of the yard. Punishment comes in many forms. Negative / positive, reinforcement or punishment can be painful physically or emotionally for dogs and humans. Being a respectable leader, (human or dog pack), requires effective communication skills. Uncomplicate it!

Are you looking for answers to questions and not getting them answered? What are you afraid of? If your goal is receiving answers about a subject you're interested in, meeting a deadline, acquiring information, teaching your dog a specific behavior, the more clearly you state your request, clarify, and give the timeframe, the more likely you will receive a likewise response. Do you really want the answer?

Exploring Further: What is the Impact you have on Others through verbal and non-verbal, written and visual communication? The list you wrote on the first page (if you did), will show that the knowledge you possess provides the ability to acquire and accomplish. Knowledge is empowering. It is a key to choices that provide answers. It opens windows of opportunity. Knowledge has an adversary called Ego. Ego is an illusion that distorts things, such as-- there is only one right answer. Some people say they don't "care" and don't have an "ego." Everyone has an ego, even dogs. Dogs have conditions too, so I do not as easily use the term "unconditional" although I get what it means in context, and dogs are contextual beings. Ego comes in different forms of monsters and hides under invisible cloaks. Ego creates fear and conflict that can have a dramatic cause and effect on any outcome. Knowledge does not try to dominate. Ego does. Knowledge is valuable when shared with others in a way that they feel they have a choice and can respond without fear of retribution or judgment.

*For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. [Sir Isaac Newton](#)
Be mindful of the energy you bring into a space! [Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor](#)*

Liha-I-Ligo! Okay, you've seen the cocktail word, and if you have had the patience to read this far, here is what it means: **Let it happen – Learn – Let it go!** No big deal you say? It is a very BIG DEAL, because humans hold onto the past. That is why we love dogs so much. They live in the present, with strong imprints and associations, so don't kid yourself. We try, but our boat somehow manages to go in reverse. It's neuropsychology and very exciting. Our brain works to protect us, but only we can choose to float from left to right brain thinking. We can be the navigator of our emotions / thoughts. We make mistakes to learn. If you do not make mistakes, you can't be very wise. Pick up the oars and row the mind-flowing boat. Cognitively, you can teach yourself to say "STOP", been there, down that path before, let's explore something new.

A word on being non-judgmental: *As a yoga enthusiast, educator and lover of dogs, I try to suspend judgment, but I'm human. Living and learning with dogs makes me a better navigator. Many try to be non-judgmental. Globally, we've recognized how our judgments separate us. It can be painful and destroy a species or planet. We can miss out of opportunities.*

In trying to be nonjudgmental, is it possible that we are only cutting off the part of ourselves that is judgmental? We can't make it go away. A defensive reaction has to do with something we're afraid of, something that we don't understand yet, or the times when we haven't expressed ourselves in some way.

Trying to be nonjudgmental may be a way of repressing a part of ourselves. We are being judgmental of our judgmental self! Try recognizing and accepting the judgmental part, then look underneath it to discover the truth, and create positive change, one-step-at-a-time. Life is three steps forward, two steps back, always one step ahead.

In summary, effective communication is interactive, dynamic, contextual, irreversible, flexible and continuous. Discussion or teaching will help remove unwanted perceptions, and identify barriers that may exist. Creating a mutual understanding will bridge the gap when reaching for a desired outcome. We may have different causes, but usually there is a common goal, whether in person or on email, with any species and that is being able to convey our message, be listened too, be respected, be appreciated and be accepted as unique individuals. Enjoy the journey and liha-I-ligo.