

Enhancing your communication skills

by Andrew Festa
The Collegian

I graduate (I get out...) at the end of this semester. I'm outta here; I'm going out into the great wide open; I'm ... Uh, what am I going to do?

How many of you are leaving soon? How many of you are really prepared for what awaits you. How many know what awaits?

If you apply to a particular business, you'll be prepared if you know the company -- its history, its employees, its record, its product, its design, its purpose, etc. -- thus giving you an upper hand in an interview.

Life, or 'the great out-there' is itself something into which you should explore, testing the waters while the results are still soft. By soft, I mean won't cost you a paycheck or your job.

This brings me to a proposal in which students get the opportunity to express themselves in a non-formal, non-teacher environment. Students would NOT receive free points toward a class grade. Instead, students would receive free points toward learning how to interact within a broader social structure which would later prove useful.

I envision a setting in which students would present their works. Possibilities: Poetry, Art, SPCOM Projects, Prose, Physics Projects, Ideas, PSY Projects and Papers, Engineering Designs, Plastics Technologies Designs, PHIL, Radio, Theater, and others. The possibilities are endless.

I say 'non-teacher environment' to minimize the negative effects of a setting in which the teacher decides a grade which will later show on your transcript.

Wouldn't it be nice to mingle with people of other fields in a non-threatening environment?

Think of the feedback you can get!

Weak in interpersonal skills? Want to see how well you'll do in a tense setting, in which there are fewer consequences and of lesser intensities? Then consider involvement in Behrend's first cross-curriculum, cross-cultural, presentational organization function.

Are you prepared for the pressures of the interview process? Want to practice in a strong SPCOM type environment in which you can broaden your abilities and reach a larger audience than students in your immediate field? Since

interacting with people of various tastes, opinions, and interests is a common facet of daily 'out there' existence, it seems only logical



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that you might want a creative environment in which to fine tune your interpersonal skills.

Of course, this is still in the theory stage. I envision the first event to be held on the first Friday after Thanksgiving, from

8p.m. to ?? (Could hold it in cooperation with Bruno's(hint hint).) It could be something great, or like many good ideas, it can fizzle out. Right now, I just want to get it out of the drawing room and into production.

Are there enough students interested in such a far-fetched idea? Do enough of you see a need for a place in which an Engineering student might get some feedback and/or help from an English student? Where a Psychology student might find an answer from a conversation with a Physics student, or a Political Science student might find fresh insight into an old and nagging problem from a Business student? Where a heck of a lot of people can mix and mingle, meeting tomorrow's world, gaining new understanding and fresh insight?

People are multi-faceted. They are, by their very nature as human beings, multi-genred.

Why not strive for a multi-genred atmosphere in which to grow?

I envision something so huge as to encompass every occupation, every major, crossing all boundaries, and touching every student. In this setting, one can learn how to interact with others, one can learn through a Feedback Mirror one's

strengths and weaknesses, one can talk to others and learn what they otherwise would have missed, and gain friends on the way.

I'd like to see it happen on a bi-weekly basis, like the Gannon reading every other Thursday at Cup-A-Ccinos downtown. It could become the biggest sensation Erie's ever seen. It could become the best thing to happen at Behrend in quite a while, including the ground breaking -- it could be well publicized and promoted to the Behrend and general communities(hint hint).

Does anyone know of a better way to learn about other cultures than to interact with, talk to, and listen to other cultures? Is there a better way to bring people together into one setting in which social interaction and critical feedback have the potential to become something strong and educational and rewarding and fun? What better way can one learn the

interpersonal skills needed for such an event?

Someone once asked me to come up with some answers instead of questions. Ok. How's this? Think it's got a chance?

Sometimes, the best crime deterrent is a small, emergency backup dog with digestive problems

by Dave Barry
Syndicated Columnist

The man was standing right outside our master bathroom. He couldn't see Beth and me, standing in the hallway, but we could see him clearly. His face was covered with a stocking mask, which distorted his features hideously. He was dressed all in black, and he had a black plastic bag stuck in his back pocket.

He was using a screwdriver to open our sliding glass door.

You always wonder what you're going to do in a situation like this. Run? Fight? Wet your pants?

I'm not experienced with physical violence. The last fight I had was in eighth grade, when I took on John Sniffen after school because he let the air out of my bike tires. Actually, I didn't KNOW that he did this, but he was the kind of kid who WOULD have, and all the other suspects were a lot larger than I was.

The man outside our house was also larger than I am. He jerked the screwdriver sideways and opened the door. Just like that, he was inside our house, maybe six feet from where Beth and I were standing.

Then he saw us. For a moment, nobody spoke.

"CUT!" yelled the director.

"Way to go, Ozzie!" I said to the stocking-masked man. "Looking good! Looking criminal!"

"I'm wondering if his bag is too dark to show up," said Beth.

Everybody wants to be a director.

Anyway, as you have guessed, Ozzie wasn't a real burglar. He was part of a production crew that was using our house to shoot a promotional video for the company that installed our burglar alarm. Here in South Florida it's standard procedure to have burglar alarms in your house, your car, your workplace, and, if you've had expensive dental work, your mouth.

I like having an alarm in our house, because it gives me the security that comes from knowing that trained security personnel will respond instantly whenever I trigger a false alarm. I do this every day at 6 a.m., when I get up to let out our large main dog, Earnest, and our small emergency backup dog, Zippy. I'm always in a big hurry, because Zippy, being about the size of a hairy lima bean (although less intelligent), has a very fast digestive cycle, and I need to get him right outside.

So I fall out of bed, barely conscious, and stagger to the back door, where both dogs are waiting, and I open the door and BWEEPBWEEPBWEEP I realize that I have failed to disarm the alarm system.



Now I have a problem. Because within seconds, the voice of the Cheerful Lady at the alarm company is going to come out of the alarm control panel, asking me to identify myself, and unless I give her the Secret Password, she's going to cheerfully notify the police. So I stagger quickly over to the panel. But this leaves Earnest and Zippy alone out on the patio. Theoretically, they can get from the patio to our back

yard all by themselves. They used to be prevented from doing this by a screen enclosure around the patio, but thanks to Hurricane Andrew, most of this enclosure is now orbiting the Earth. The hurricane did NOT blow away the screen door, however. It's still standing there, and the dogs firmly believe that it's the only way out. So -- I swear I'm not making this up -- instead of going two feet to the left or right, where there's nothing to prevent them from simply wandering out into the yard, they trot directly to the door, stop, then turn around to look at me with a look that says, "Well?"

"GO OUTSIDE!" I yell at them as I lunge toward the alarm control panel. "THERE'S NO SCREEN ANYMORE, YOU MORONS!"

"I beg your pardon?" says the Cheerful Alarm Lady, because this is not the Secret Password.

"Bark," says Earnest, who is trotting back toward the house, in case I am telling her that it's time to eat.

"Grunt," says Zippy, as his internal digestive timer reaches zero and he detonates on the patio.

We do this almost every morning. We're very dependable.

In fact, if some morning I DIDN'T trigger a false alarm, I think the Cheerful Alarm Lady would notify the police.

"You'd better check the Barry residence," she'd say. "Apparently something has happened to Mr. Barry. Or else he's strangling one of his dogs."

So the alarm people have been very nice to us, which is why we let them use our house for the video. It had a great Action Ending, wherein Ozzie runs out our front door, and an armed security man drives up, screeches to a halt, leaps out, puts his hand on his gun and yells "FREEZE!" This is Ozzie's cue to freeze and look concerned inside his stocking. They shot this scene several times, so there was a lot of commotion in our yard. Fortunately in South Florida we're used to seeing people sprint around with guns and stocking masks, so the activity in our yard did not alarm the neighbors. ("Look, Walter, the Barrys planted a new shrub." "Where?" "Over there, next to the burglar.") Anyway, the point is that our house is well-protected. The alarm system is there in case we ever need it, which I doubt we will, because -- thanks to Zippy -- only a fool would try to cross our patio on foot.