

The Communication Skills That You Need as a Tour Operator

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Introduction

- I will begin with a question:
- "What makes two tour operators selling the same safari at the same price achieve completely different sales results?"
- Participants to answer??
- Conclude:
- "The difference is often communication. Customers buy from people they trust, understand, and feel comfortable with."
- And "As tour operators, we are storytellers, problem-solvers, negotiators, marketers, and customer service professionals. Every one of these roles depends on effective communication."
- TALK ABOUT COMMUNICATION AT THE WORK PLACE- How do people communicate amongst themselves at work. it starts there

WHAT DOES COMMUNICATION TAKE??

- **1. Active Listening**
- The first communication skill is listening.
- Many tour operators spend too much time talking about itineraries instead of understanding what the client actually wants.
- Ask questions like:
 - Why are you travelling?
 - What is your budget?
 - Have you visited East Africa before?
 - Are you travelling with children?
 - What experience are you looking for?
- Listening helps you recommend the right package instead of the most expensive one.
- Example, A client asking for a gorilla trekking safari may actually want a honeymoon experience, photography trip, or family holiday.
- Listening uncovers the real need.
- Also listening to the client helps you advise them on the best tour to take, give them options too. This assures the client that actually you have the depth of knowledge about the different products, whom it suits best and which budgets it matches

2. Clear and Professional Speaking

- Clients should understand you easily.
- Avoid tourism jargon. Words like pax, etc
- Instead of saying
- "The itinerary includes game drives and boat cruises."
- Explain
- "You'll enjoy morning wildlife viewing when animals are most active, followed by a relaxing boat cruise where you'll see hippos, crocodiles, and many bird species."
- Speak:
 - confidently
 - clearly
 - politely
 - enthusiastically
- Your voice should inspire confidence.

3. Effective Written Communication

- Most bookings begin through:
 - Email, WhatsApp , Social media , Website enquiries
- Poor writing creates doubt.
- Good communication includes:
 - proper grammar, short paragraphs, correct pricing , clear inclusions, quick responses, Always avoid vague responses.
- Instead of; "Package available."
- Say, "Thank you for your enquiry. Our 5-day Uganda Gorilla Safari includes accommodation, park entrance fees, transport in a 4x4 safari vehicle, an English-speaking guide, and bottled drinking water."
- Professional writing builds confidence.
- **NOTE: DON GIVE UP ON WRITING EMAILS, FOLLOW UPS BOTH ON WHATSAPP AND ANY MEDIA**
- A briefcase tour operator won himself customers worth \$30,000 because he responded to their inquiries on time, gave them impromptu information about their trip. And this speed convinced the clients to buy a safari with him

4. Customer Service Communication

- Tourism is a people business.
- Always communicate with:
 - patience
 - empathy
 - respect
- Even difficult clients deserve professionalism.
- Remember:
 - People may forget what you said,
but they never forget how you made them feel.

5. Storytelling Skills

- Tour operators don't sell destinations.
- They sell experiences.
- Instead of saying:
- "Murchison Falls is Uganda's largest national park."
- Tell a story.
- Imagine standing on top of the world's most powerful waterfall while millions of litres of water squeeze through a narrow seven-metre gorge before crashing below.
- Stories create emotion.
- Emotion sells travel.

6. Cross-Cultural Communication

- Tourists come from different cultures.
- Understand differences in:
 - greetings
 - punctuality
 - humour
 - body language
 - expectations
- Examples:
 - European travellers often appreciate punctuality.
 - American travellers usually appreciate friendliness and enthusiasm.
 - Asian travellers may value detailed planning.
 - Always respect cultural differences.

7. Non-Verbal Communication

- Communication isn't only words.
- Your:
 - smile
 - eye contact
 - posture
 - dress code
 - facial expressions
- all communicate professionalism.
- A welcoming smile creates a positive first impression.

8. Negotiation Skills

- Clients often negotiate prices.
- Don't simply reduce prices.
- Communicate value.
- Instead of saying
- "I'll give you a discount."
- Say
- "I can include airport transfers at no extra cost."
- Protect your company's value.

9. Conflict Resolution

- Things sometimes go wrong:
 - delayed flights, vehicle breakdowns, bad weather, lodge overbookings
- How you communicate during problems matters more than the problem itself.
- Use this approach:
 - Acknowledge- "I understand your frustration."
 - Explain- "This happened because..."
 - Offer solutions- "Here are two options."
 - Follow up- "Is there anything else I can do to assist?"

10. Persuasive Selling

- Selling is helping people make decisions.
- Focus on benefits rather than features.
- Instead of
- "The lodge has a swimming pool."
- Say
- "After a long day of gorilla trekking, you can relax by the pool while enjoying spectacular forest views."
- People buy benefits.

11. Digital Communication

- Today's clients communicate online.
- Be professional on:
 - WhatsApp
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - LinkedIn
 - Email
- Respond quickly.
- Avoid using slang.
- Use professional profile photos.
- Maintain consistent branding.

12. Presentation Skills

- Tour operators frequently present to:
 - travel agents/ corporate clients/ schools / churches /international buyers/ exhibitions
- Good presenters:
 - maintain eye contact, speak confidently, use visuals, avoid reading slides, engage the audience
- Practice improves confidence.

13. Networking Communication

- Tourism depends on relationships.
- Communicate professionally with:
 - hotels
 - airlines
 - guides
 - transport providers
 - tourism boards
 - international agents
- Networking creates opportunities.

14. Crisis Communication

- **Emergencies happen.**
- **Examples:**
 - lost passports
 - medical emergencies
 - accidents
 - political unrest
- **Remain calm.**
- **Communicate facts.**
- **Avoid speculation.**
- **Keep clients informed.**
- **Coordinate with authorities where necessary.**

15. Follow-up Communication

- Communication doesn't end after payment.
- Follow up:
 - before arrival
 - during the trip
 - after departure
- Ask:
 - "How was your safari?"
- Request reviews.
- Thank clients.
- Maintain contact.
- Happy clients become repeat clients and ambassadors.

Practical Activity

- Divide participants into pairs.
- Give them this scenario:
 - A client wants a 5-day Uganda safari but thinks it's too expensive.
- One participant acts as the client. (I will be the client)
- The other acts as the tour operator.
- Observe how they:
 - listen
 - ask questions
 - explain value
 - negotiate
 - close the sale
- Discuss what worked well.

Key Takeaways

- Summarize with these points:
 - Listen before you sell.
 - Speak clearly and professionally.
 - Write messages that inspire confidence.
 - Build trust through honesty.
 - Tell stories that bring destinations to life.
 - Adapt your communication to different cultures.
 - Handle complaints calmly and respectfully.
 - Sell value, not just price.
 - Follow up to build long-term relationships.
- **Closing Remarks**
 - **"People may find the same destination elsewhere, but they return to the tour operator who made them feel heard, valued, and confident. In tourism, communication doesn't just support the business—it is the business."**

The End