

Chapter 16 – Communication

“We hear only half of what is said to us, understand only half of that, believe only half of that, and remember only half of that.” – Benjamin Franklin

Many operational problems can be traced to poor communication, making communication an essential management skill. Whether it is training, public speaking, email, or day to day communication with your staff; effectively conveying your point of view is essential to a successful facility, organization, and event.

Effectively communicating to your employees will result in a more efficient operation and will help achieve the bottom-line objectives of any company, business, or basic interaction. As a manager, your communication skill is critical in directing the actions of your employees. Communicating effectively with your customers will ultimately make your product, event, or facility a success.

First, thoughtfully formulate the message. Being prepared helps to calm any nervous feelings and will help you stay on point with your communication. This involves determining the meaning that you want to convey and to whom you want to communicate the message. To formulate the meaning of the message, draw upon background attitudes, perceptions, emotions, opinions, education, and experience as well as research on the particular topic.

The message is then sent to the listener verbally, by speaking, and non-verbally, through gestures and appearance and the written word. The person receiving this message then interprets its meaning. To do this, the listener uses his background, attitudes, perceptions, emotions, opinions, education, and experience.

Effective Communication

You have heard the term effective communication, but what does that really mean? Effective communication is the way that your diverse audience, who views information from many different perspectives, will be able to understand and use the material that you present. Don't forget that a major aspect of effective communication is listening; active listening. Maintaining eye contact, eliminating distractions, and concentrating on both the verbal and nonverbal cues are examples of attention skills.

Five Tips for Active Listening:

1. **Acknowledge ideas, thoughts and feelings first.** Acknowledge ideas, thoughts and feelings by nodding and saying things like “uh-huh” to let the speaker know that you truly hear what they are saying. A response example might be, “It sounds like you have really thought about this idea.”

2. **Say it in different words.** Say it in different words by reflecting back what the other person has said to you by paraphrasing in your own words. For example, "If I understand you correctly, you feel like you have exhausted all of your options and don't know where to go next."
3. **Ask open-ended questions.** Ask open-ended questions like, "How do you think these new regulations will affect your program?"
4. **Summarize and clarify.** Summarize and clarify the exchange by going back over the main points and questions. Ask if there are other options that they haven't considered.
5. **Give an opinion.** Give your opinion – if wanted. Ask the other person if they are interested in hearing another opinion or if they just needed to talk out their ideas or issues.

Consider verbal communication skills (including phone communication), listening skills, written memorandums/email/social media, and non-verbal communication. Also, reflect upon all the people we communicate with: subordinates, peers, supervisors, customers, and groups of people. In addition, ponder some of the reasons, why we communicate: to give and receive information, to discipline subordinates, to make assignments, and more.

Why Managers Need to be Effective Communicators?

- Communication is used so frequently that "we cannot afford to do it poorly".
- Communication has a special power: to create interest, stimulate action, achieve agreement, and foster enthusiasm.
- Communication is the primary method that managers use to direct their employee's behavior.
- Communication is the basis for almost all other managerial skills. It is involved in delegating duties to subordinates, motivating employees, demonstrating leadership abilities, training new policies and programs, and counseling performance problems, etc.

Barriers to Effective Communication:

- **Talking too much about your own experiences, such as "You think that's crazy, guess what happened to me?"**
- **Moralizing, preaching, or being judgmental. Don't take what the other person says personally if it is contrary to your personal beliefs.**
- **Asking a direct question to satisfy your personal curiosity – this could derail the conversation and cause the other person to shut down.**
- **Giving advice, analyzing, or interrupting.**

Non Verbal Communication

Even before the first word is uttered, various factors are already at work that can affect the success or failure of your communications such as appearance and body language. Nonverbal communication refers to the gestures and body positions that accompany this communication. All people display certain gestures or lack of them when speaking or listening. It is important to be aware of your nonverbal communication, because it plays a big role in making your total communication effective. Effective communication occurs when a person's verbal message and nonverbal message both "say the same thing." Problems in communication occur when the speaker's words say one thing, but his gestures and body language says something else.

Types of Nonverbal Communication

All of the following are aspects of nonverbal communication. In the specific context, they should correspond and reinforce the spoken message.

- Eye contact.
- Position of our arms and legs.
- The distance we stand from others when talking to them.
- Where we sit at a table or in relation to others.
- Smiling.
- Nodding or other head movements.

For example:

- When taking charge of a situation, have good eye contact with your subordinates, stand in a straight posture, and use a firm but not overbearing voice.
- Upon noticing customers, employees should smile to indicate friendliness, make eye contact to acknowledge the customer's presence, turn their body in the direction of the customer to indicate his willingness to help if needed.

Appearance

Before you ever say a word, you are sending a message to those around you just by your appearance. In the book *Dressing for Success*, the author notes that other people conclude about 17 different things about us just on the basis of how we appear. Most of us make these snap judgments about others based on the way that they look every day. Recall the story a couple of years ago of the "man with the golden voice" who was living on the streets and discovered by a passerby when he spoke, was recorded on a cell phone, and the video posted on YouTube. His talent was hidden by his appearance.

Many businesses utilize a dress code to guide people to the appropriate type of attire. It used to be traditional within the business world for men to wear a coat and tie and a woman a skirt with hosiery and pumps. Changes have occurred in this area and work places have become

much more casual. Use good judgment and consult your schedule when deciding how you will dress for the day. You can be more casual when you are working in your office all day than if you are scheduled to give a briefing or make an appearance to promote your product. Also, keep in mind that a customer, patron, potential business connection, or guest could stop by your workplace at any time; don't allow yourself to become too casual. Grooming is just as important as dress. The unkempt appearance of your person or your office can send the wrong message. Understand expectations as they relate to dress code and ensure you are in tune with the company position.

Communicator's Personality

The personality of the communicator plays a part in both the formulation of the message and in how the message is communicated. Each individual's beliefs, opinions, prejudices, feelings, biases, and personal experiences enter into the development of a message. Most of the time this happens quickly, automatically, and out of habit. In addition to influencing what we think and say, our personalities also play a role in how we say the message. You may know of an instance where two managers sound completely different in conveying the same exact message to a listener.

Verbal Communication

The goal in communicating verbally is to convey a message to another person by speaking so that the other person understands it exactly as the person talking intended. A well communicated message is one which the other person can accurately repeat back in his own words. Verbal communication can be made more effective by:

- Talking about specific rather than general situations.
- Using concrete language, e.g., "merchandise" rather than "stuff".
- Using words familiar to employees; explain unfamiliar words.
- Including an example to illustrate the point.
- Giving sufficient detail to convey the point.
- Giving details slowly and in order.
- Making it a practice to address the five "W" questions in the topic (if applicable).

Who is involved?

What is the situation; how did it begin?

When will it occur?

Where is it taking place? What you think, believe, feel?

Why will it happen? Why is this important?

Phone Conversations

It is very important to be aware of your tone and the use of words when communicating by phone because you won't have the advantage of reading nonverbal cues. You can, however, pay special attention to the tone of the other person and use your active listening skills to effectively communicate.

If you are speaking to someone that you know or have spoken to previously, pay attention to changes in their usual voice qualities or tone. When people change their normal voice qualities, they are communicating something extra. It is up to you to look for cues to detect what these changes in customary voice tones mean. Give your phone conversation the same priority that you would give when talking to someone in person. This is not the time to multitask!

Written Communication

When writing, it is best to remember this equation, Effectiveness = Conciseness + Completeness, or, the simpler, shorter, and more direct the better.

Try the following tips for achieving concise and complete communication.

- Use simple words; your goal is not to impress your reader with your vocabulary, it is to get the point across.
- Make sure to use the correct words to exactly express your thoughts; the wrong wording can skew the entire message.
- Make the sentence structure clear; poor grammar, run on sentences, etc., can distort the point you want to make and confuse the reader.
- Use a different paragraph for each complete unit of thought.
- Make sure all of the necessary information is included.
- Anticipate questions and include the answers in your message.
- Use only essential words and phrases.
- Make sure your facts, dates, times, etc., are correct.
- Consider the tone of your message. Make sure it doesn't contain antagonism or preaching. If you are upset about something, it is OK to write out your thoughts and ideas for making the situation better. Then make sure you do not send it until you read it again the next day. You will find in most cases that what you want to say does not change, but how you say it will change dramatically once you are less emotional.
- Make sure it is neat in appearance.

These rules also hold true for electronic communication and social media messages to customers. Keep your tone appropriate to the message. Also, make sure you have a standard signature block on your email that gives all of your contact information. Communication is not very effective if people cannot reach you.

Communicating to a Group

Communicating to a group can be as simple as making an announcement or as complex as running a training program requiring large group participation. Pre-communication factors such as your appearance, credibility, and the specifics of the situation play a large part in establishing a successful presentation. Speaking effectively and using nonverbal body language that supports the spoken word is important. A particularly skillful speaker can even "read" the nonverbal cues of the group as a whole and use this information to adjust his message.

Many people have a fear of public speaking. The famous comedian Jerry Seinfeld once said "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death... This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy." One of the most important things that you can do to overcome this issue is to know your material. This is different than memorizing a speech. If you are confident in your knowledge of the subject, you will speak in a more relaxed manner and feel comfortable answering any questions that may arise. Knowledge and familiarity with your material also makes it easier for you to speak directly to your audience. No one wants to have a power point slide read to them.

Three Strategies to Overcome the Fear of Public Speaking from Harvard Extension School Instructor, Steven Cohen:

1. **Visualize yourself succeeding** – See yourself going through every step of the speech, from the walk to the stage to the applause at the end.
2. **Relax!** – The "t-repeater," a breathing exercise to relieve your nerves before speaking, and easing into eye contact can help you stay calm in front of a crowd. (For more on this see the Resources page)
3. **Practice in specific ways.** You don't want to memorize the entire speech, but instead focus more on the introduction and conclusion of the presentation.

Communicating on the Job

Before the message is formulated and communicated, be aware of to whom you will be sending the message. How and what you communicate can change depending upon the intended audience.

Upward Communication

When communicating to your immediate supervisor, a formal message should be prepared, formulated, and presented in a specific manner. For example, if you need to seek assistance from a supervisor, asking an open-ended question will result in more information than a question that can be answered yes or no.

Peer Communication

If the communication is intended for a peer, the message might be less "formally" prepared and

presented. For example, less background information might need to be given since the peer can "easily relate" to the situation to be described.

Downward Communication

As a manager when communicating to employees, use clear, concise, directions, but don't become a dictator. Employees should not be afraid to ask a clarifying question and should feel empowered to make decisions based on your clear direction. It never hurts to follow-up the message with, "Do you have any questions?" Additionally, it is always a good idea to check for understanding. Simply take a second and ask them to "recap what we discussed." By doing this, you can clear up any miscommunications. This step is also helpful for employees as it allows them to communicate back to you that they heard and understood your direction.

Communicating With Customers

Communicating to a customer also affects how the message is formulated and delivered. Messages conveyed to customers need to be totally accurate and delivered in a professional and friendly manner.

Purpose of the Communication

When you talk to someone as a manager, you usually have a purpose. The purpose of the communication differs depending on the situation and whom you are addressing. A few reasons for communication:

- To motivate employees.
- To communicate with a customer or fix a problem.
- To teach, instruct, or explain.
- To counsel an employee.
- To seek information or assistance.
- To socialize.

With each of these purposes, the communication changes in order to accomplish your goal.

One of my favorite leaders used to say, that you have become a master of communication when you are able to tell someone where to go and have them look forward to the trip!

Summary of Chapter 16

Effective communication is a key managerial tool in making a success of any product, service, or event. This includes active listening and nonverbal communication. Public speaking is difficult for most people, but it can be learned, and those who do become proficient at expressing their ideas publicly will tend to have more success than others who shy away from this form of communication.

Listening is sometimes more important than speaking!