



# The Art of Effective Communication

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# The Despair of Ineffective Communication

There are many problems that can be quickly and easily solved if the parties involved were to communicate effectively.

One small misunderstanding can have extremely damaging consequences for an entire organization.

Poor communication causes:

- Frustration among managers, bosses, co-workers and executives
- Missed deadlines and incomplete projects
- Unnecessary work and re-work

# Resolving Conflicts and Removing Barriers

## **An all too common mistake...**

Having and giving others proper expectations are both important in working and personal relationships.

I always say, “I can’t hold a person responsible for something that I did not give them proper instructions about.”

What does that mean?

It means, what I **communicate** to you, whether professionally or personally is all that I can legitimately **expect** you to respond to or manage.

For example, if I don't tell you that I need the financial report back by Tuesday at 3 pm, I can't be upset when you don't deliver it by Tuesday at 3 pm.

By the same token, if I tell my manager that I can have a project done in 2 days then by golly, I better be able to deliver it in 2 days... because I gave him/her that expectation.

## **\*The MOST COMMON MISTAKE\***

### **Having and setting wrong expectations**

Here's the thing:

=> You can only expect from people that which you make perfectly clear to them.

**And** you **should** be held responsible for any expectation which you set pertaining to your skills and your ability to deliver based on job requirements.

Many secretaries underestimate what's required, first, for the job overall and, second, for specific tasks.

**When this happens, honesty is always needed... immediately.**

Be honest and upfront with your manager about what you **can** handle.

Conversely, never be afraid to communicate what **you** expect from **him/her**.

If there is one thing that I have learned, it is that communication is not just you talking. What I mean is that if the person you are talking to does not grasp what you are saying, you have not really communicated your point. The goal of communication should be mutual understanding and not just to spout out a bunch of information.

When communicating with managers, co-workers and even vendors, you should confirm everything. You should be wary of people who never carry paper and a pen or never make the attempt to get paper and a pen when communicating with you because they trust and rely on their memory and they want you to do the same.

You should also be wary of people who don't ask additional questions about an assignment or instruction because few instructions are complete at the beginning. When people don't ask additional questions about an assignment, they are not giving any thought to it. Lastly, avoid people who always reply to your requests with "I will try to get to it" because they will never get to it.

If you are this person, get yourself together quick. When given an assignment you should be asking questions like "Is there a deadline?" or "When do you need to have this budget completed by?" or "Is there anything else I should know about this project?"

When communicating to a group of people, you can use comparisons ensure that everyone understands.

Restate your important ideas in different words or use illustrations and specific instances of something similar to what you are trying to convey. Remember, your goal is to be understood and not just heard.

Skill in communication involves a number of specific strengths. Strength in listening is vitally important. The following list provides some suggestions for effective communication:

- Give your full attention and fight distractions
- Listen openly, with empathy for others
- Ask, repeat or rephrase what is being said to make sure you fully understand
- Judge the content, not the messenger
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues and body language
- Ask the other person for as much detail as she can provide
- Respond in an interested way that shows you understand what is being said
- Ask others for their views or suggestions
- State your position clearly and be specific

- Communicate your feelings but don't act them out (attack the problems, not the people)
- Be as descriptive as possible
- Don't totally control conversations, acknowledge what others are saying, and don't interrupt them
- Decide on specific follow-up actions with specific due dates and make sure all parties agree

Defensiveness is a major source of problems in communication. It is a result of our tendency to take easily take offense. Taking offense is a choice and we should not give in to the temptation.

People who make the effort to communicate effectively are aware that defensiveness is a typical response in a work situation especially when negative information or criticism is has to be presented. Realize that when people feel threatened or that they are being attacked, they will want to protect themselves and try to make adjustments to compensate for their likely defensive stance.

The offended person may become angry, aggressive, competitive, or solitary. A supportive and effective communicator:

- Focuses the discussion on the information needed and does not stoop to attacking a person's character
- Uses probing questions to keep dialogue going
- Is not afraid to ask tough questions to get to the root of an issue
- Keeps eye contact and uses welcoming body language
- Reiterates their understanding of what they are hearing
- Summarizes the key points and always focuses on resolutions that are win-win for all involved parties

In your career you may spend over 75% of your time talking to and dealing with people. It is no surprise that at the root of a large number of challenges is poor communication. Effective communication is an essential component of our success.

It is no longer acceptable to hide behind deficiencies. Learning to communicate well with others is critical in order to be successful in getting your job done in excellence. As distasteful as it may be, it is necessary.

Remember, small changes produce great results. Focus on becoming better one step at a time.

# The Write Way to Handle Email and Written Communication

Is email a thorn in your side? Do people ignore your emails or constantly ask you questions that you've already answered in them?

When writing emails, you should follow a few simple rules to get them read and cause the reader to act on what's written.

- Your subject should be concise and to the point. It should use a few well-chosen words that grab the reader's attention and tell them exactly what they will find when they open it. Including the action you want the reader to take helps too. For example, "Please respond by 2pm".
  - Bad Subject: Meeting
  - Good Subject: Today's 2pm Meeting Agenda
- Use bullet points or numbered paragraphs to make for easy reading and keep points separate. You could also only cover one specific point per email and send separate emails if you are covering different topics.
- Be clear and concise, not overly wordy.
- Close the email by clearly telling them what you want them to **do**.

## **The Perfect Written Letter**

A well written letter is extremely valuable and has the potential to be just as impactful to its reader. It may be the first “experience” someone has with your company and as we all know, first impressions are lasting impressions.

Before you begin writing any letter, answer the following questions:

1. What is my purpose in writing this letter/memo/report?
2. What does my reader want or need to know to understand my message?
3. Have I answered important questions and provided the necessary information for the reader?
4. Did I accomplish my purpose?
5. Have I included boring, confusing, or distracting information?
6. What do I want the reader to do when he or she is done reading this?
7. Is that clear to the reader?

8. Have I included all the information necessary for the reader to take this action?

Most problems with business letters are they are either hard to understand or very long and drawn out. In order to avoid this problem, double check your letters to make sure they are:

- Clear – know your purpose and state it early
- Concise – short and to the point is best
- Correct – always proofread for grammar and spelling
- Courteous – your letter is still a form of customer service
- Conversational – make the letter easy to read
- Convincing – touch the reader's emotion
- Complete – provide all necessary information

Don't waste your reader's time. This is accomplished by knowing why you are writing and what you want to achieve. If you cannot answer these two questions, you should reconsider writing your letter. Keep your letters as short as possible without missing any important and relevant information. Nobody minds reading a letter that is engaging and to the point.

Business letters may be formatted differently, but they all have the same elements. They have a letterhead, a date, an inside address, a salutation, a body, a complimentary closing,

signature, and the name of the author of the letter. The three most commonly formats used are block, modified block, and semi-block.

State the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph. And finally, close the letter by restating its purpose and including your contact information.

## Top 10 Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills

1. Give your full attention and fight distractions
2. Listen openly, with empathy for others
3. Ask, repeat or rephrase what is being said to make sure you fully understand
4. Judge the content, not the messenger
5. Pay attention to non-verbal cues and body language
6. Ask the other person for as much detail as she can provide
7. Respond in an interested way that shows you understand what is being said
8. Ask others for their views or suggestions
9. State your position clearly and be specific
10. Communicate your feelings but don't act them out (attack the problems, not the people)

