



Communication SNAFU Avoidance Strategy

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COMMUNICATION SNAFU AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

(SNAFU = Situation Normal All Fouled UP)

Written by Larry Johnson – 6/4/19

Have you ever asked someone to do something and the results they produce show that somehow, the message got lost in translation? The temptation here is to blame the other person and think, “Weren’t you paying attention?” “What is wrong with you?” Or, if you’re a magnanimous sort, you might say to yourself, “Maybe I wasn’t clear.” Either way, a Communication SNAFU caused a delay in getting what you wanted. Or, even worse, some kind of disaster.

There’s a rule taught in every college communication course that says that when there is a failure in communication between a sender of a message and the receiver, the failure is always the fault of the sender. That’s because it’s the sender who wants to convey the information, who is structuring the message, and who wants to get some result. So, it is up to him to tailor the communication so the receiver gets it. It’s like, if you want City Hall to issue you a building permit, you figure out what the rules of the game are and then tailor your strategy to get City Hall to do it.

Otherwise, you can blame City Hall all you want for them not giving you what you want, but you'll still not get the permit.

Communication SNAFU Avoidance Technique

So, here's a technique to avoid a Communication SNAFU and get the results you want from the receiver of your messages.

After asking the person to perform the task, make sure she understands what you want her to do. That make sense, right? Unfortunately, the way we often do that is to ask her, "Do you understand?" or "Did you get it?" Or, "Got it?"

And, typically, she'll say, "Yup. Got it."

It is the unusual person who will respond with, "No, I didn't understand what you were talking about." That's because she doesn't want to look stupid. Or, she thought she got it but didn't, or she thinks you'll pass judgment on her if she didn't get it. So she will often say, "Yup, I got it" when she didn't.

I suggest that you never again ask the question, "Did you understand."

Better to ask, "Can you run that back by me so I know I covered everything?" Or something to that effect. That way,

instead of relying on her opinion of whether she got it or not, you ask her to demonstrate that she did, indeed, “got it.”

Take Responsibility For The Communication SNAFU

Notice that the beauty here is that you are taking responsibility for the possible communication SNAFU, if there is one. You’re not saying, “Repeat that back to me so I make sure you got it.” That’s almost like calling her stupid. Instead, you’re taking the burden of the miscommunication on yourself. This reduces the chances she’ll become defensive and you will know if she got it, and if she didn’t, you can clarify it so she does.

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