

Say it Right



COMMUNICATING YOUR WAY TO

Communicating is easy. Communicating effectively—well, that's another story...

On average, we spend 80% of each day communicating, regardless of our position in an organization. “No way,” you say. Think about it!

We communicate with customers, managers, and employees on the telephone, through e-mail, and in person. Our body language reveals how we feel or think about situations or individuals, even when we don't utter a word. The average manager spends a minimum of 60% of each workday listening to customers and staff. That totals 24 hours of the 40-hour workweek!

Effective communication skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are the most important interpersonal skills for group dynamics, team development, and customer service. And to communicate well, *all* of those skills must be developed.

LACKING THE BASICS

As children, we spend between 8 to 12 years learning to read and write. The average business person uses both of these skills 20-25% on any given day. However, the existing American educational system provides for less than two years of speaking skill development. And few American schools make any attempt at all to teach students how to listen. This lack of training can hurt us in the business world, where we use speaking and listening skills 70-75% of the time.

TIPS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND GET AHEAD IN YOUR CAREER

The following are important communication basics that are essential for every competent business person. Learn to do them well and your chances of success in the workplace will increase dramatically.

1. Use “I” statements.

Begin sentences with “I need,” “I want,” or “I feel.” People will understand you more clearly if you take ownership of your directives.

2. Be Specific and Complete.

Make sure you carefully outline your expectations. Describe exactly how a task must be completed (unless you're encouraging the individual to finish the job creatively). When appropriate, write down your expectations. If you're not clear, you can't expect others to anticipate what you want.

3. Don't Mix Verbal and Nonverbal Messages.

Body language is a major part of communicating. If you are happy but have a cross look on your face, no one will know exactly what message you are trying to convey.

4. Be Redundant.

If someone does not understand your message, think of new ways to present the information. Remember that people can learn by seeing, by hearing, and by doing. You can reach your audience faster if you use the words they mentally tune into most comfortably. For example, those who learn by seeing respond to, “What does the ideal job *look* like to you?” Those who learn by

hearing understand statements such as, “What does it *sound* like in your ideal office?” Those who learn by doing respond to, “What does your ideal job *feel* like?”

5. Ask for Feedback.

Check to ensure that all communication you send is understood. If it’s written material, ask the recipient to respond. If you are speaking, ask the listener to repeat your message. A simple, “tell me in your own words what you think I said,” allows you to find out immediately if the message was received correctly.

6. Present Single Ideas.

One idea is easier to grasp than several ideas presented at once. State a series of thoughts on one topic in a logical sequence that is easy to understand and follow. After explaining each element, confirm that the listener understands you before moving on to the next thought.

7. Avoid Judgment.

To keep the lines of communication open, give feedback without judgment. People won’t provide information if they believe their message will be judged unfairly. Attentive listening is critical and if you’re unclear about a statement or a circumstance, always ask for clarification. It’s important to avoid formulating conclusions until you have all the facts.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Remember when you tried baseball or tennis or golf for the first time? Initially, you were probably frustrated. You struggled to swing the bat, racket, or club in rhythm as you tried to make your hands work in coordination with your eyes, shoulders, and feet. But you knew that to succeed, you had to learn the basics.

The same principle holds true when learning to communicate effectively. You have to practice. But all the hard work pays off when you create the foundation on which to build a successful career.

COMMUNICATING DURING THE INTERVIEW

Communicating effectively is especially critical when you are interviewing. To make a great impression, follow these tips:

- **Listen Carefully.**

The better you understand the company’s requirements, the better you’ll be able to frame answers to questions as solutions to needs.

- **Practice Brevity.**

Interviewers lose interest when presented with long-winded answers. Answer thoroughly, but be as brief as possible.

- **Show Enthusiasm.**

Interviewers love to speak with candidates who are interested and energetic about the job opening. And remember to smile!

- **Ask Questions.**

Questions indicate that you are interested and you have done your homework on the company.

- **Keep Your Eyes Open.**

An interviewer’s body language or “vibes” between co-workers can give you insight into the work environment.

A reputable staffing firm can also provide you with valuable information about the company with which you are interviewing, including appropriate dress, prevailing corporate culture, interviewer personalities, and even the best parking spots. All this information can help you nail the interview and get the job of your dreams!

This article was adapted from the work of Eileen O. Brownell, President of Training Solutions, based in Okla. City, OK. For more than 25 years, Eileen has served as a high-energy speaker and trainer who captivates audiences and makes learning a lasting experience. Her expertise lies in the areas of customer service, conflict resolution, communication, and team development. For more information about Eileen’s speaking/training services and learning tools, call her at (888) 324-6100 or e-mail her at trainstars@aef.com.