

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Most issues are essentially about communication. When communication breaks down, misunderstandings develop, rumors start, silos are created, and effectively reaching a desired outcome becomes further out of reach. When you become more adept at clearly sharing and gathering information, whether as an individual or as an organization, you are more likely to be effective.

It seems simple – you “send” communication and others “receive” it. But, we know that becoming a great communicator requires skill and knowledge. Communication works best when time is taken to think through and plan for desired outcomes – spontaneity is great in many areas, but in communication we need to be mindful of what we’re doing and how we’re doing it. There are specific approaches and action steps that can be taken to maximize the positive outcomes of any communication. In order to successfully communicate, five specific approaches are essential:

1. hold the relationship as valuable,
2. clearly think through the outcomes you want to get from the communication,
3. do your best to expand your perspective to include the perspective of those with whom you are communicating,
4. take responsibility for how you communicate, and
5. be truly authentic in your actions and words.

Support and develop the relationship

*“Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement,
all success, all achievement in real life grows.”*

Ben Stein

- Relationship is at the heart of all communication. Communication is more effective when we view it as an opportunity to further build our relationship with those with whom we’re communicating.
- We must focus not only on our desired end results, but also on connecting with the other person/people.
- By building trust within the relationship, you strengthen possibilities that communication will flow effectively.

- Focus on the long-term in communication – you may not necessarily win every “battle,” but by building the relationship for the long-term you are more likely to win the “war.”
- Remember Stephen Covey’s theory of the “emotional bank account.” When we take the time to build “deposits” of good will, connection and rapport with someone, then we will not go “in the red” when we make an unforeseen or unintended “withdrawal,” such as a slight, a negative comment, or tough conversation.

Develop clear intentions

“If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.”

Ancient Chinese proverb

- Only when we clearly know what we hope to get from a communication – what we want the audience to say, do, know, etc. – are we likely to get our desired outcome.
- Time spent on thinking through the reason behind a communication and the outcome we desire before the communication is never wasted.
- Your intention needs to be specifically what you want from your “audience” – what you want them to say, do, know, etc. – not what you want for yourself. With this focus you’ll be able to target the communication so that it more likely appeals to your audience.
- If the outcome you desire isn’t attainable in one communication, break it down into smaller, attainable goals. If the outcome isn’t worthwhile, don’t waste your or others’ time in the first place.
- Think through clearly what you hope to get from a communication before you start speaking.

Keep an open perspective

“The real voyage of self-discovery is not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

Marcel Proust

- Self-awareness is a key ingredient for effective communication – be aware of the biases, information, points of view, values, gaps, etc. that you bring to the communication.
- Admit and handle any underlying and/or latent emotions that emerge during or due to the communication. Consider the underlying and/or latent emotions of your audience as well.
- Fully understand your audience – their needs, wants, points of view, current understanding, background, etc. – to yield a better connection.
- Tailor communication to your audience – share information differently based on who will be hearing you.
- Contemplate What’s In It For Them (your audience) to listen to and communicate with you and to yield the outcome(s) you desire.
- If you don’t have background information on your audience, ask for it and/or research it.
- Suspend your own judgment, ideas, and perspective as much as possible to be truly open to what others have to say.

Take responsibility for actions

“You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself.”

Jim Rohn

- It is always “your” responsibility to communicate more effectively – by accepting responsibility for the communication and its outcome, you are more likely to communicate in a way in which you can be heard and effective.
- Only 7% of the meaning conveyed by communication is from the actual words spoken. It is essential to use “non-verbals” – eye contact, facial expression, body language, vocal characteristics, etc. – that express and support the message you want to share.
- Even though they are only 7% of the conveyed meaning, specific words can either open up a conversation or shut one down. Choose your words carefully to avoid destructive outcomes.
- Different mediums are more or less effective for communication depending on the situation, needs, audience, desired outcomes, etc. It is important to choose the “channel” that will best support the communication.
- Accept responsibility for ineffectively communicating when others don’t hear what you intended – don’t place the blame elsewhere.

Remain authentic

“It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is.”

Desiderius Erasmus

- If you don’t truly care about those with whom you are communicating, or about what you are communicating, your audience will know – it’s hard to fake it.
- People are more willing to be vulnerable and open to effective communication when they sense your vulnerability/openness as well.
- While there are communication “best practices,” it is most effective to be yourself and to use your own style.

Seek help through the process

*“Wisdom is knowing what to do next,
skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is doing it.”*

David Starr Jordan

- To communicate most effectively, find someone who can offer you an outside perspective and expertise to support you through building your strengths and style.
- If poor or inadequate communication is an issue within your organization or your work team, consider communications skills training and make effective communications a part of the competencies upon which employees and managers are evaluated.

SUMMARY

There are specific approaches and actions that a person or an organization can take in order to communicate more successfully. It is important to: 1. hold the relationship as important; 2. clearly think through the outcomes you want to get from the communication; 3. do your best to expand your perspective to include the perspective of those with whom you are communicating; 4. take responsibility for how you communicate; and 5. be truly authentic in your actions and words. In essence, it is important to take time to plan and prepare for important communications. With this time, effort, attention, and at times support from someone with an outside perspective, it is possible to communicate effectively to achieve your goals.