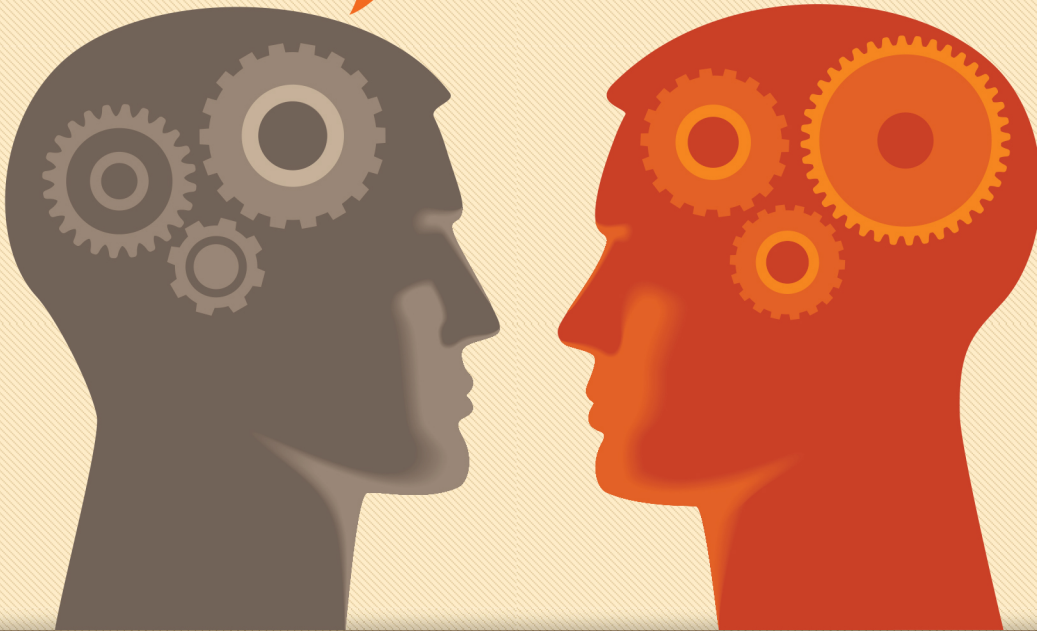


Effective Communication



Why Communication Matters

Effective communication is a critical component of organizational success. It is used to exchange information, persuade others to accept our message, solve problems and, even, entertain. Yet, not every organization or their leaders do it well. To become an effective communicator, you need to have the desire, understand the communication process, master basic skills and practice.

“The most important thing in communication is to hear what is not being said.”
– Peter F. Drucker

According to *The Holmes Report*, the cost of poor communication is substantial. It cites the following:

- The total estimated cost of employee misunderstanding (including actions or errors of omission by employees who have misunderstood or were misinformed about company policies, business processes, job function or a combination of the three) in 100,000-employee companies, among 400 surveyed corporations in the United States and United Kingdom, is \$37 billion
- The average annual cost per company is \$62.4 million
- Cumulative annual cost per worker due to productivity losses resulting from communications barriers is \$26,041

Communication occurs in every aspect of business, which is why understanding how ineffective communication can impact organizations' bottom line is important. As mistakes and misunderstandings add up, profits go down.

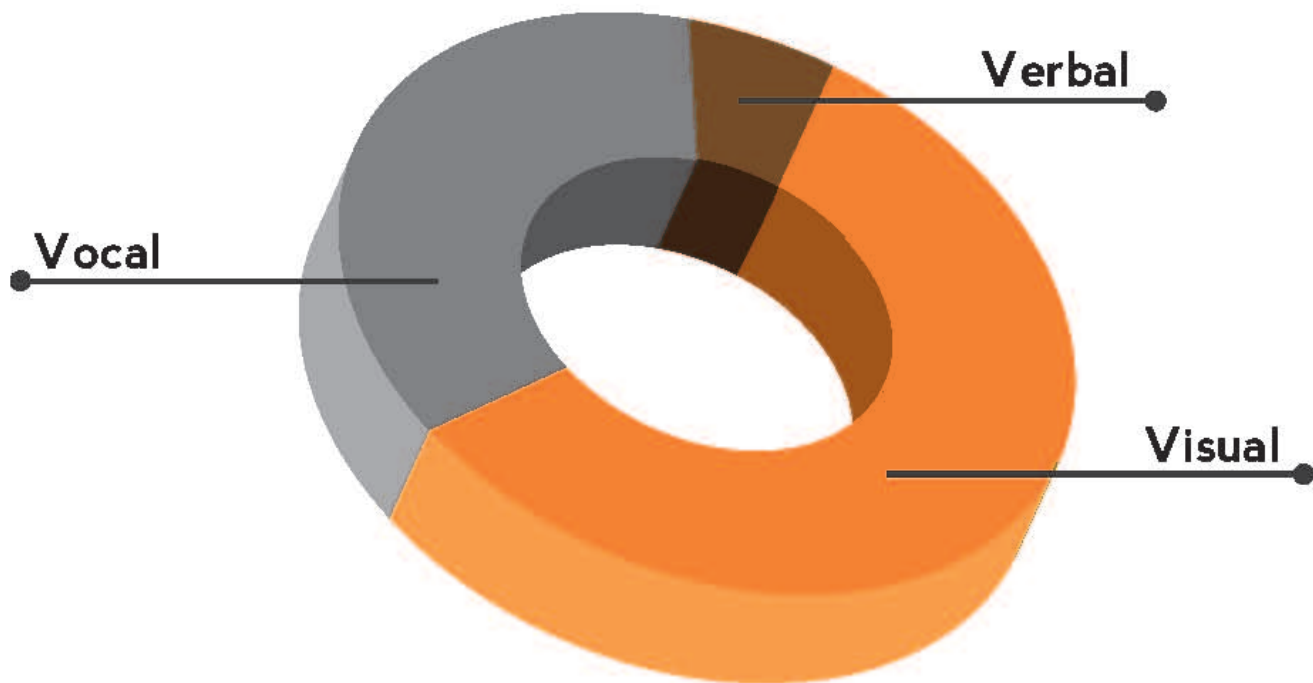
The good news is that everyone possesses the ability to communicate effectively. Great leadership requires effective communication and effective communication allows shared leadership to thrive in this competitive economy. Communication is the vehicle to accelerate teamwork within your high performance organization. As organizations prepare to compete in today's ever-changing and challenging environment, they understand that communication is one of the most important skills to develop in business training.

Effective communication inspires results. It allows employees to be their best and creates organizational synergy – the interaction of team members to produce an effect greater than the sum of each individual contribution. In short, effective communication and teamwork are the solutions to many challenges our organizations face today.

Types of Communication

Communication methods – the spoken word, written communication, physical expressions or mixed methods – are diverse and offer varying ways to connect with others. When communicating, people are perceived by others in three ways, including:

- Verbal: the words you say
- Vocal: your voice's intonation and inflection
- Visual: your facial expression and body language



These perceptions can enhance communication or create barriers that inhibit effective communication. For example, the attitude of the sender or receiver, the emotional climate, and body language can put the receiver at ease or on guard. Hidden agendas, interruptions and the introduction of known "hot buttons" also create barriers. Often, it is a matter of semantics and, with education and practice, these can be avoided.

The Importance of Listening

Since communication is a two-way process, being a good listener is essential for effective communication to occur. Listening is the ability to accurately perceive a message conveyed by another person. It is far more than the exchange of information. It is effectively used to create a "safe place" for others to explore their inner feelings. Effective listening builds confidence and trust in relationships.

Good listeners have the ability to be open to the conversation and willing to listen. They are able to concentrate and listen actively, not passively. They know to ask questions, specifically open ones, to show interest and listen to the answers. They also go one step further and ask for feedback to reinforce they heard the correct message.

Active listening is a skill that enhances and encourages communication. Becoming a good listener means being attentive to the person speaking and actively seeking clarification and understanding of what is said. Becoming a good listener involves these essential elements:

- Paying attention and showing you are really listening
- Establishing and maintaining good eye contact
- Using silence when appropriate
- Not jumping to conclusions – listening to all that is being said
- Keeping an open mind and not picking and choosing what you would like to hear
- Seeking clarification and paraphrasing what you have heard

Non-verbal Listening Skills

Do

- Make frequent eye contact
- Smile and nod
- Lean toward the speaker

Don't

- Cross your arms
- Look down and away from the speaker
- Tap fingers or fidget

Communication Skills for Leaders

Effective communication is an essential part of leadership. Some leaders choose to use informal communication means as they can be received more readily. Others prefer formal processes. As a leader, it is important to understand the audience and choose the method that will be most positively received. When communicating, leaders must be able to separate fact from inference and be able to provide accurate details and directions, which can be challenging.

Leaders have various channels of communication that are used, including:

- Face-to-face
- Telephone and teleconference
- Presentations
- Memos, letters and emails
- Reports and briefs

Communication Strategies

Strong Communicators

- Explain ideas clearly
- Express opinions clearly and concisely
- Ask listeners if they are following the conversation
- Control emotional responses
- Allow others to finish their thoughts
- Focus on actions and behavior not individuals or personality
- Have empathy
- Are able to admit mistakes and willing to apologize
- Opt to resolve problems diplomatically
- Ask thoughtful questions to receive clarification

Strong Listeners

- Respect others' ideas and words
- Patiently wait for the speaker to make his or her point
- Give full attention to the speaker
- Ask relevant questions for clarification of points
- Are prepared when possible
- Repeat, paraphrase or summarize comments to ensure understanding
- Maintain eye contact with the speaker
- Avoid personal biases
- Acknowledge the speaker through positive body language

Feedback:

An Important Communication Talent

Feedback is essential for personal and professional growth and it is often the most difficult aspect of communication. However, by being cognizant of certain aspects, feedback can be successfully given and received.

Effective leaders know that when providing feedback, instead of making demands, sharing ideas and information is much more effective. They also ensure it is well-timed. The recipient should be calm – not rushed – and the meeting should be scheduled with ample time to address the issues. Feedback should also focus on descriptions not judgments. For example, the team member's behavior should be addressed not his or her personality.

When providing feedback, leaders should focus on specific items that can be addressed tangibly. Ambiguous statements are ineffective and unproductive. Take the receiver's needs into consideration and paraphrase to help the receiver understand the feedback that is being provided.

Leaders should not just provide feedback, they should receive it. Strong, confident leaders routinely request constructive, respected and well-placed critique.

We all have strengths and abilities in how we communicate with others. However, there are skills that can be enhanced by developing effective communication. Encourage yourself and others in your organization to create individual action plans that directly address the ways you can be more effective in terms of communication on individual and group levels.

There are real costs to poor communication. Poor communication is often the result of a failure to convey and understand the information, intent or meaning of the message. Yet, when people communicate effectively, they can build productive working relationships, solve problems, supervise others and create trust in the workplace. Each represents characteristics of high performing organizations.

“You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere.”

– Lee Iacocca



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