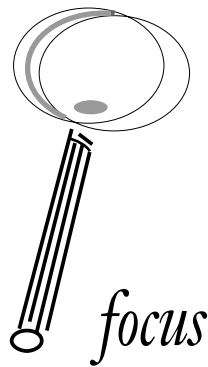


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Communication: The Key to a Manager's Success



Learning Objectives

When you complete this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define *communication* accurately in one brief statement.
- State the reasons managers communicate and identify the four major types of communication.
- Describe what can happen when communication doesn't work.
- State obstacles to clear communication.
- List the key actions that are essential for clear written or spoken communication.
- Evaluate your communication skills at work.

OVERVIEW

As a manager, much of your job involves communication, so the ability to communicate clearly is crucial to your ability to succeed. You need to give explanations, ask questions, work with people to solve problems and come up with new ideas, coach and train, provide performance feedback, and more. All those activities require communication skills.

In this course, you will learn what happens when real communication takes place and what makes communication difficult. You will evaluate your own communication skills and learn how to improve them. You will also learn how to apply what you learn to ensure that the communications you engage in every day are more satisfactory, useful, and productive.

WHAT IS “COMMUNICATION”?

We hear the word *communication* everywhere these days as technological advances make it possible for us to communicate in an increasing number of ways. But what does the word *communication* really mean?

No matter what the form of communication or whether it is one-way or interactive, between individuals or within a group, communication takes place only when a message sent by one person has been received and understood by another person. That’s what Jory didn’t realize.

Feeling rushed by a looming deadline for a report her manager wanted right away, Jory asked Saul to help by getting her some marketing statistics. “I need the figures from the last three years,” she said. “Will that be a problem?”

“Not at all,” Saul replied.

But by mid-day, Saul had still not gotten the statistics to Jory—and her report was due first thing in the morning. Saul was out, so she left him a voicemail: “This is Jory,” she said. “I was wondering, how soon do you think you can get me those stats for the marketing report?”

Two hours later, Jory received an e-mail from Saul: “I’ll have those stats to you the day after tomorrow.”

Jory called Saul again, relieved to find that he was in his office. “Friday’s too late,” she said. “The report’s due tomorrow.”

“Why didn’t you say you needed them so soon?” Saul said. “I’m sorry, but I have to leave in twenty minutes, and I’m at an off-site meeting all day tomorrow.”

Jory thought she had told Saul what she wanted, and Saul thought he had heard her. But no real communication took place in this situation, and now Jory is left without the statistics she needs to complete her report. What happened?

Jory knew Saul had received her message, but she didn’t check to make sure that he understood how urgently she needed the statistics. She did not realize that it is not enough to send a message. Real communication takes place only when the person at the other end understands exactly what you meant to say.

WHY MANAGERS COMMUNICATE

Think about all the communications you engage in as you go about your day-to-day business—face-to-face conversations with individuals and groups, telephone calls, e-mail messages, letters and reports, meetings, interviews, and presentations. One reason for all that communicating is to pass on information people need. What are some of the other reasons?

Reasons for communicating:

You might have listed some of the reasons in Exhibit 1–1.

When you look at all the reasons you have for communicating, it is easy to see why it is so important to communicate successfully. Poor communications waste time, lower productivity, and make it difficult to maintain good relationships. Along with misunderstandings and confusion, the results of poor communication include hurt feelings, frustration, and anger.



Exhibit 1–1

Reasons Managers Communicate

Managers communicate to:

- Pass on and receive information.
- Establish and maintain relationships.
- Tell people what they are expected to do and help them learn.
- Give feedback and criticism.
- Encourage, motivate, and influence.
- Help others solve problems and develop action plans.
- Work with others to come up with new ideas.

**Think About It . . .**

Think of some communications you were part of that did not go well. What were the results?

WHY PEOPLE FAIL TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

Even the best communicators find that communicating clearly is often difficult. No matter how clearly they try to send their messages, people do not always understand them. No matter how attentively they try to listen to others, they do not always understand the message the way the other person meant it.

Think of a time when you had trouble communicating with someone. What obstacle or obstacles stood in the way?

You might have listed one of the common obstacles shown in Exhibit 1–2.

**xhibit 1–2****Obstacles to Clear Communication**

Obstacles to clear communication include:

- Lack of time and planning.
- Competing messages.
- Differences in knowledge, perspectives, needs, expectations, priorities, status, culture, and gender.
- Assumptions.
- Fears.

Lack of Time and Planning

Jory asked Saul to get her the statistics because she was feeling rushed. In fact, she was feeling so rushed that she didn't even take enough time to think about what she wanted him to do. As a result, she conveyed an incomplete message.

People commonly blurt out their messages without thinking, especially when they feel rushed. Sometimes those messages come out clearly; often, they do not. If you expect others to understand your messages, you must first be sure that you know exactly what you want to say.

Competing Messages

We receive thousands of messages every day. They come at us in every direction, competing for our attention. The telephone rings and an e-mail lands in your mailbox while you are trying to conduct an interview; people are telling jokes in the next cubicle while you are trying to explain something to an employee; newspaper headlines catch your attention and a radio talk show blares in your ear while you are trying to help a colleague solve a problem. Screening out the unnecessary messages can be almost impossible, but unless we can screen them out, we will find it hard to pay attention to relevant, useful messages.

Differences in Knowledge, Perspectives, Needs, Expectations, Priorities, Status, Culture, and Gender

Jory's miscommunication to Saul occurred partly because they had differing priorities. Jory's top priority was getting the report to her manager on time. Although Saul was willing to help, he felt no sense of urgency because the report was not important to him.

In the same way, it can be hard to communicate clearly to someone who has a very different level of knowledge from your own or a very different point of view about the topic. For example, suppose you need to explain how to use word processing software to someone who has never used a computer. You might not stop to think about the basic computer knowledge the person needs to have before the new software can be learned.

Communication would be far easier if other people had your level of knowledge, background, sense of what was important, and way of looking at the world. The reality is that people differ in many ways. Those differences have a great many advantages, but they also mean that we have to work hard to be understood and to understand one another.

Assumptions

Jory made the assumption that Saul understood she needed the report right away; obviously, she was wrong. Assuming that someone understands what you are trying to say often leads to that kind of miscommunication, as does assuming that you have understood someone else's message correctly or that you know what a person is going to say as soon as they begin speaking.



Think About It . . .

Can you think of a time when you made the assumption that someone understood you when they did not? That you understood someone else's message when you did not? Or that you mistakenly believed you already knew what someone was going to say? What was the result?

Fears

Instead of saying what we mean, we sometimes convey messages that are little more than hints. We leave out key information. We say *Yes* when we mean *No*. We also hesitate to speak up when we don't understand what someone else is saying. Why do we behave this way? Why don't we just say what we mean, and why don't we ask questions when someone sends us a confusing message?

People do not always say what they mean because they are afraid of what will happen if they do. They do not want to hurt people's feelings, disappoint them, or make them angry. They also do not want to take the risk of appearing foolish or being disliked. But indirect, incomplete, and vague messages make it difficult or impossible to achieve real communication.



Think About It . . .

What are communications that you find difficult? Think of a time when you felt unable to say what you meant or when you did not feel comfortable asking questions when someone was unclear. What were the results?

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Before you can improve your communication skills, you need to recognize your strengths and weaknesses. Rate your communication skills by filling out the self-assessment in Exhibit 1–3. When you are finished, highlight or circle any items that you rated 1, 2, or 3. Pay special attention to those skills during this course.

WHAT IT TAKES TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

In this course you will learn and practice specific techniques for communicating clearly, whether you are holding a conversation, facilitating a meeting, conducting an interview, giving a presentation, or writing a business document. In



Exhibit 1–3

How Well Do You Communicate?

Use the scale below to rate your communication skills.

Seldom 1 2 3 4 5 Most of the time

1. ___ I listen attentively when other people are speaking.
2. ___ I understand what other people say to me.
3. ___ I ask for clarification when I don't understand what someone is saying.
4. ___ I listen with an open mind even if I don't agree or I already know what a person is going to say.
5. ___ I do not interrupt when people are speaking.
6. ___ I let people know that I have heard and understood their message.
7. ___ I am able to express my ideas and feelings clearly.
8. ___ I make sure that people have understood my message.
9. ___ I know how to deliver unwelcome news.
10. ___ I am comfortable discussing other people's feelings.
11. ___ I make eye contact with other people when I am listening or speaking to them.
12. ___ I am able to get my ideas across in meetings.
13. ___ I am able to give people helpful feedback and criticism.
14. ___ I am able to ask questions that help people think something through.
15. ___ I am able to ask questions to elicit useful information.
16. ___ When facilitating a meeting, I am able to ask questions that encourage participation.
17. ___ I am able to use communication skills to help people learn.
18. ___ I am able to give a successful presentation to a small group of people I know.
19. ___ I am able to give a successful presentation to any group.
20. ___ I am able to communicate clearly, confidently, and successfully in writing.

fact, you will find that the key actions presented in Exhibit 1–4 apply to all the forms of communication we will discuss.

Know and Respect Your Audience

Two of the key actions for communicating clearly are knowing and respecting your audience. Throughout the course, you will be asked to look at your message from your audience's point of view. By doing that, you increase the chances that the message you send will be understood.

Know Why You are Communicating

As we mentioned earlier in this chapter and will repeat from time to time, knowing what you want to achieve by communicating is essential for your communications to be clear.

Know What You Want to Say

Even in a casual conversation, you have to know what you want to say before you can express your message clearly. As you will see, it is especially difficult—even impossible—to deliver a successful presentation or write an effective business document without first determining what you want to say.

Pay Attention

In our busy lives, we are surrounded by distractions. It takes a special effort to pay attention to what someone is saying or even to pay attention to what you yourself are trying to communicate. But paying attention is key to successful communication.

Keep an Open Mind

As you learned in this chapter, assumptions are a common obstacle to successful communication. Later in this course you will learn how assuming you already know what someone is going to say or why they are saying it gets in

E**xhibit 1–4****What It Takes to Communicate Clearly**

To communicate clearly:

- Know and respect your audience.
 - Know why you are communicating.
 - Know what you want to say.
 - Pay attention.
 - Keep an open mind.
 - Be specific.
 - Take enough time.
-
-

the way of listening, making it difficult or impossible for real communication to take place.

Be Specific

The more specific your messages, the more useful information you will convey. Hints and vague messages lead to misunderstandings and confusion. To communicate successfully, try to use specific language that communicates exactly what you want to say.

Take Enough Time

Trying to communicate in a hurry leads people to stumble over their words, leave out important information, and miss what others have to say. As you will learn in this course, the time you spend planning a communication, delivering a message, and listening to others will pay off in fewer misunderstandings and less confusion. Taking enough time is a key action for communicating successfully.

A

Apply What You Learn . . .

Think about the communication skills you would like to improve. What are your goals for this course? List your most important goals on the first page of the Communication Skills Log in the Appendix at the end of the course.



Real communication takes place when someone receives a message we send and understands what we intended to say. Poor communication leads to problems such as wasted time, misunderstandings, and bad feelings. But communication is not always easy because obstacles such as lack of planning, differences in points of view, assumptions and fears get in the way. Some of the actions you can take to communicate clearly are to respect your audience, know what you want to say, pay attention, and keep an open mind.



Review Questions

1. A recommended way of increasing the chances of successful communication is to: 1. (c)
 - (a) speak loudly.
 - (b) repeat your message at least once.
 - (c) pay attention.
 - (d) use polite phrases such as *Please*.

2. Which statement accurately describes *communication*? 2. (a)
 - (a) A message that has been received and understood
 - (b) The act of sending a message
 - (c) Active listening
 - (d) The art of using language to impress people

3. Learning to communicate clearly is important to managers because: 3. (b)
 - (a) most managers communicate poorly.
 - (b) poor communications make it difficult to maintain good relationships.
 - (c) managers spend almost 50 percent of their time giving feedback and criticism.
 - (d) open office systems have increased the amount of communication managers need to do.

4. Which is an assumption that gets in the way of clear communication? 4. (a)
 - (a) Not listening because you think you already know what the other person is going to say
 - (b) Rude behavior that makes the other person angry
 - (c) Interrupting someone before they are finished because you are late for a meeting
 - (d) Not being able to hear because people are talking loudly nearby

5. Which statement is most accurate? 5. (c)
 - (a) When it comes to communicating, the most important thing is to make sure the other person hears you.
 - (b) If you think you might hurt someone's feelings, it is better to keep your message vague.
 - (c) To communicate clearly, look at your message from your audience's point of view.
 - (d) Once you learn to be a good communicator, you will not be bothered by competing messages.

Do you have questions? Comments? Need clarification?
Call Educational Services at 1-800-225-3215, ext. 600
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