

Keys to Communication

by Tom Warney

How much is poor communication costing you in your business?

Consider for a moment what happens when people don't have the skills to express themselves clearly, quickly and directly, or to listen effectively, or to understand the needs and goals of those they deal with. Think of the lost time, the wasted money, the customers who left unsatisfied, the anger, resentment and cynicism among managers and employees, the lack of motivation, the lower levels of productivity and profit.

It's no wonder that in survey after survey, employers **and** employees rank excellent communication skills at the top of their "must-have" lists.

What would be the results in your business of even a 10% improvement in interpersonal communications? What if you could improve attitude, efficiency and productivity all at once? What if you could cut absenteeism, illness and turnover? What if you could turn the negative stress, the fear and the cynicism into passion, commitment and job satisfaction?

Sound like a dream? Not when you consider that the central factor in each case is the same — **communication**. Recognize and adjust the key element in a system, and the system's functioning will improve dramatically.

What is communication? It can simply be defined as "**mutual understanding and knowing**" and any process that results in this. It may include everything from simple informal conversations to formal management or union interactions, negotiating, sales, customer service, or the presentation of new ideas to a group. Effective communication is essential to **every** area of business.

Here are “Seven Keys to Excellent Communication” that can easily be applied, personally and professionally:

1. **Self Understanding.** Know what you want — your goals, your desired outcomes, what’s important to you, your needs.
2. **Self Mastery.** Take the time to learn, practice and be confident with the essential skills of communication: clarity, focus, good listening skills, emotional control, vocal control, body language and writing skills.
3. **Understanding Others.** Practice finding out what other people need and want, what’s important to them, what their goals are. Understanding and empathy are essential to good communicating.
4. **Avoid Traps.** Learn to recognize and avoid the pitfalls of communication, such as judging others, labeling unfairly, namecalling, sarcasm, using “veiled threats,” trying to impose solutions before being clear on the problem, avoiding or discounting the concerns of others.
5. **Personal Power.** Cultivate legitimate power based on who you are, not what the organization chart says you are. Develop and maintain a positive attitude, communicate with congruence — no “mixed messages.”
6. **Flexibility.** Be willing to welcome and respect the input and ideas of others. When something doesn’t work, don’t “get a bigger hammer,” but instead **try something different**.
7. **Win-Win.** Realize that goals can be achieved and needs met in many possible ways. Use a collaborative problem-solving approach to find creative solutions that work for everyone.

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