

Elements of Effective Communication

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Abstract:

Communication is central to the success of human beings and organizations. The ability to effectively communicate at work, home and in life is probably one of the most important sets of skills a person needs. Effective communication is not just a business skill-it is a life skill and the most important source of personal power at work, family and social situations. Communication is the process of understanding and being understood through ideas, facts, thoughts and emotions. Good communication is determined not by how well we say things but by how well we have been understood. (www.careerindia.com)

Communication is a process by which message is conveyed to someone or a group of people. If the message is conveyed clearly and unambiguously, and is received by the receiver in the same way as intended by the sender, then communication is said to be effective. If the message reaches the receiver in a distorted form or somehow fails to create meaning or understanding, the communicator should realize that his/her communication has been affected by barriers. So we can say that communication becomes successful only if the receiver understands what the sender is trying to convey. The feedback received by the sender from the receiver allows the sender to determine how the message was interpreted and, if necessary, whether there is an opportunity to modify future messages.

A careful communicator will remember that "to effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with other." An effective communicator anticipates the unlimited ways a message can be understood or misunderstood. Thus the communicator must not only take care of his/her message but also he/she has to keep his/her audience's background in mind to ensure his/her communication receives desired feedback and his/her communication goal is achieved. In this context, John Powells's observations sound sensible: "Communication works for those who work at it." You can be sure of your communication skills when you get the ability to act and react quickly at a subconscious level.

Elements of Effective Communication:

Even the use of the most sophisticated technology cannot guarantee effective communication. The world is changing rather fast and the communicator has to keep pace with the change. However, there are certain elements in all effective communication and to communicate effectively these attributes are to be taken care of. The elements of effective communication can be discussed under several headings:

Clarity of Thought and Expression:

The communicator must first know what he/she wants to convey and why. It is very much essential that he/she understands the purpose of his message. Communication without a clear objective amounts to groping in darkness like the seven blind men arguing the size of the elephant. The message should be clear in order to solicit effective feedback. Effective communication begins when someone thinks clearly. You should know what you want to communicate. And the better you know it, the more clearly you can communicate it. Clarity of thought and expression is central to effective communication. If you cannot think clearly; you cannot express yourself clearly. Never think communication is spontaneous; you have to make it happen. The major mistake in communication is to believe that it happens.

Correctness / Appropriateness:

The message should not only be candid and clear, it should also be correct. It should be correct in spelling, grammar, content and format. Be sure that the statistical data, if you are using any, is correct. Use specific facts and figures. Ensure that the rules and conventions of spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage, and idiom are correctly used as also style (appropriateness of word choice and level of formality to audience, purpose, and material). Rules of grammar and syntax (and punctuation) are to be followed to avoid ambiguity. Check if social and cultural appropriateness have been maintained. Make sure that the timing and choice of medium are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and material. But technology cannot guarantee that you will make an effective communicator. Dr. Laurence J. Peter humorously remarks: "The advantage of modern means of communication is they enable you to worry about things in the entire world." It is worrying over a correct medium.

Conciseness:

The message should be concise: it should give only the information that is necessary and important, using as few words as possible but not sacrificing its completeness and clarity. Concise messages save time, catch attention by their terseness and reduce noise. First ensure that the material is arranged in a logical and coherent sequence and examples are relevant, specific, detailed, sufficient and persuasive. In most of the communications, particularly business communication, it is always advisable to come straight to the point.

Conducive Environment:

The environment in which a message is sent or received can also affect its meaning, shows a research. "News stories on a general-interest news website might never appear in a newspaper circulated in the financial community. What's important to readers in times of war differs from what's important in times of natural disaster when traditional media might not even be operating. Communicators must understand the environment in which they are sending messages to help their audience received information in the context in which was intended," argues an expert.

Feedback:

Communication is a two-way street: it needs the efforts of both the sender and the receiver for success. It is a complex process. The communication, in spite of all efforts, may fail simply because the receiver somehow fails to provide feedback or the sender fails to interpret the feedback correctly. Then, do you think communication is difficult? If your answer is 'yes' you're right. "Communication is so difficult," asserts a guide, because at each step in the process there is major potential of error. By the time a message gets from a sender to a receiver, there are four basic places where transmission errors can take place and at each place, there are a multitude of potential sources of error. Thus, it is no surprise that social psychologists estimate that there is usually a 40-60% loss of meaning in the transmission of messages from sender to receiver.

It is critical to understand this process, understand and be aware of the potential sources of errors and constantly counteract these tendencies by making a conscientious effort to make sure there is a minimal loss of meaning in your conversation. It is also very important to understand that a majority of communication is non-verbal." Inability to follow feedback properly might spoil the very purpose of communication. In order to be able to study feedbacks and responses, many factors including the language and culture of the receiver/audience are to be judged. That is why you need to be familiar with your audience; however, it may not be possible always. But you can recognize their feelings and anticipate reactions. The receiver also partly bears the onus of making the communication successful through effective feedback.

Completeness:

Communication intends to create meaning and understanding and therefore needs to be complete in all respects. Incomplete message breeds misunderstanding and faulty interpretation. Even sometimes a communicator, in his/her eagerness to become concise, adopts shortcuts. Clarity is hampered in absence of completeness. To highlight the point, a group of communication specialists observes: "Completeness offers numerous benefits. First, complete message is more likely to bring the desired results without the expense of additional messages. Second, they can do a better job of building goodwill. Messages that contain information the receiver needs show concern for others. Third, complete messages can help avert costly lawsuits that may result if important information is missing. Last, communications that seem inconsequential can be surprisingly important if the information they contain is complete and effective." So provide all necessary and relevant information to your receiver.

Seven Steps for Effective Communication:

1. Listen more carefully and responsively
2. Explain your conversational intent and invite consent.
3. Express yourself more clearly and completely.
4. Translate your complaints and criticisms into specific requests, and explain your requests.
5. Ask questions "open endedly" and more creatively.
6. Express more appreciation
7. Make better communication an important part of your everyday life.

Conclusion

This paper finding has shown that communication can be a matter of life and death. The most critical and obvious reason behind the collapse of corporate houses is poor communication. Bad communication has been at the heart of all problems, whether it is social or professional. If you become aware of the elements that go to make effective communication happen, then practice will take you into the realm of success.

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