



Avoiding A Failure To Communicate

By Craig Harrison
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It's in every classified ad and most job descriptions: must have *excellent communication skills*. Worse yet, once hired, it reappears annually at review time: improve communication skills. What's a worker to do? Communication skills don't require a graduate degree, just some common sense, a bit of homework, and a better understanding of the role communication plays...in everything:

Listen. Don't assume that better communication skills mean you've got to speak like John F. Kennedy or orate like Jesse Jackson. Listening skills are the most ignored aspect of good communication skills. More misunderstandings occur due to poor listening than to misstatements. To be a good listener, suspend that urge to speak while others are speaking. Similarly, don't begin to prepare what you'll say next. Listen intently, with ears, eyes, mind and body. Are you following what's being said? If so, nod in agreement. If not, a furrowed brow indicates you're confused. Your speaker needs these cues. If you truly heard and understood them repeat it back, in your own words. This lets both parties know they're on the same wavelength.

Mind Your ABCs. Some people turn complex topics into simple explanations. Sadly, others' talents lie in the opposite direction: making simple topics complex. I strive to mind my ABCs, in writing and speaking: Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity. General Douglas MacArthur once remarked that even more important than giving orders that could be understood, he always issued orders that couldn't be misunderstood! Whether or not lives are at stake, your reputation as a communicator may be. People appreciate short sentences; they are often confused by long, convoluted ones. Keep it succinct.

Don't Get Labeled Missing In Action. Some excellent communicators are deemed less so for not contributing in meeting situations. A woman from overseas was culturally uncomfortable speaking up in meetings. Others monopolized the meetings, often rudely interrupting to make a point. Her timidity, coupled with self-consciousness surrounding

Failure to Communicate *Con't*

her command of the English language, resulted in her wall flower demeanor. The night before meetings she now reviews the agenda, composes her thoughts and rehearses making powerful yet concise statements about agenda items of the day. To others her remarks appear off-handed. She's thus perceived as a more powerful and effective communicator. She's also developed a nice yet firm statement when she's interrupted which reminds people she hasn't yielded the floor yet. After a few invocations of this phrase others respect her opinions better. More importantly, her boss has noticed and applauded her new assertiveness.

It takes two. I knew a worker who was fired for her boss's inadequacies as a communicator. Don't pay the price for another's communication shortcomings. It may require some work on your part but it's worth the effort.

I once had a boss who listened but never asked questions. After a while I anticipated the questions that needed to be asked and posed them myself, or simply provided responses as if he'd asked them. I would come prepared each meeting with a list of project-related questions which showed my foresight and attention to detail. It benefited us both.

Write Speech. It sounds like a Buddhist precept, yet remember, writing is a big part of communication skills. Let e-mails, weekly written reports and other writings reinforce your clear thinking, organizational skills, attention to detail, and ability to express important ideas. Make your writing easy to read. Spelling matters, even in e-mail. Use white space, numbered lists and bulleted items to communicate more effectively. Titles, subtitles and lists similarly add cogency to your communications. Write your piece, set it aside for a spell, then review it and strike out 25percent to say it more succinctly.

Speak Up! Consider taking a public speaking class, joining a local Toastmasters club or Speaking Circle® to improve your oral communication skills. The new skills, offline practice and confidence gleaned will help you in meetings, in giving reports and making presentations.

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Excellent communication skills help in many ways. With practice you can confidently give a speech, make a cold call, train others; conduct a meeting, make a sales presentation, interview someone or be interviewed.

When the going gets tough you'll be able to assert yourself when necessary, negotiate effectively, constructively critique another's performance and co-exist with diverse personality styles.

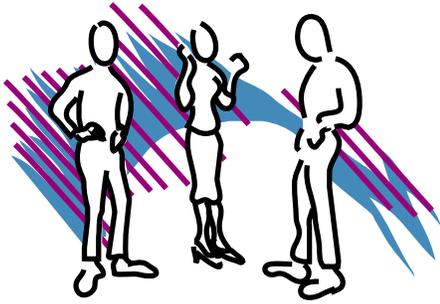
In "one-on-one" situations excellent communication skills will help you instill trust in others, engender their support, and diffuse verbal criticism.

Study and practice these techniques and then you too will benefit from possessing excellent communication skills.

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DEVELOPING YOUR COMMUNICATION QUOTIENT (CQ)

EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

WITH CRAIG HARRISON

Communication takes many forms.

In a typical work day you may communicate with customers, clients, co-workers (including superiors, subordinates and colleagues), vendors and city, state and federal representatives. Do you communicate with interns or volunteers? On occasion you're also speaking with the media: members of your association or even competitors. How well are you communicating with each?



Each form of communication draws on different skills, each requires different approaches and sometimes even a different lexicon. Forget GQ! These days it's your CQ that matters...your Communication Quotient.



Learning Objectives



- ▶ Develop techniques for delivering an effective report in a meeting
- ▶ Elicit co-worker support for a project by speaking the language of benefits; learn how to make "the ask"
- ▶ Learn to speak one-on-one with a co-worker regarding a problem
- ▶ Build and motivate a work team
- ▶ Learn the ABC's of written communication
- ▶ Handle difficult questions and difficult questioners
- ▶ Discover how to give instructions that can't be misunderstood
- ▶ Master the apology and the recovery



How The Presentation Is Delivered

Definitions, positive and negative anecdotal case studies, illuminating role playing activities and a practical question & answer session all help attendees DEVELOP THEIR COMMUNICATION QUOTIENT.



About Your Presenter

Craig Harrison writes, trains, coaches and speaks about communication and its vital role in professional success. His articles have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, he has been profiled by *The Wall Street Journal*, and interviewed by 60 MINUTES, BBC RADIO, *Selling Power* and *Business Week* magazines. Craig has trained corporate, academic and non-profit groups to communicate with clarity and confidence. As 2004-05 president of the NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION's Northern California chapter, a past president of the INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE ASSOC. (SF-Silicon Valley chapter), and past District Governor for TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL, Craig has helped thousands improve their communication skills.



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