

Leaders Path Newsletter

May 2007

Communication is the foundation for everything we do in the workplace. Communication happens everyday, all the time and; cannot not happen. Communication problems - such as conflict or miscommunication - have a devastating role in undermining your organization's success. In an article for Twin Plant News titled "Follow the Value Chain", I profiled a case where a client was losing \$16,320 per week because a department of 40 employees were losing four hours per day due to conflict, miscommunication and misunderstandings.

This article profiles the seven biggest reasons for communications problems that we have found. I also provide some ways for you to avoid them. These communication collapses may seem basic. However, if you practice the fundamentals you will improve your chances of being understood and be able reduce conflicts.

Communication is the most important skill in life. It is the foundation for everything. You have to be able to communicate in order to succeed. Unfortunately, communication collapses occur every day in the workplace; even though we've been communicating all our lives.

To become better communicators, we need to consciously work at it. The rewards are worth the effort. By improving your communication skills, you'll increase your effectiveness as an employee which increases your likelihood of success in the future. You'll also find that your relationships – at work and at home – improve as well.

Believing There is One Reality

The first communication collapse, "believing there is one reality," is revealed during this scene. Our brain filters reality through our experience, beliefs, and education and then imprints a new reality.

For Your Consideration:

How do your experiences, beliefs and education impact your perception of reality?

How can you remain open to considering another person's perception of reality?

How should you handle not agreeing with another's perspective?

What is the benefit of examining varying perceptions of the same reality?

How can these help improve communication?

Choosing the Wrong Communication Method

Choosing the wrong method of communicating information can make it difficult for the receiver to process the information, or even accept it. It is important that you consider the best way to communicate a particular type of information to a specific audience.

For Your Consideration:

Who needs the information?

What is the most efficient and effective way of delivering the information?

Is the information sensitive or complex?
Is the information confidential?

In today's workplace the most common methods of communication by category are
Audio: phone call, voice mail, conference call
Visual: email, note, printed report
Kinesthetic: scheduled meeting, drop by visit, demonstration

The categories above are based on learning styles. When you are trying to make sure your message is understood, adjust your presentation to the audience's learning style. Think of a time when you felt that what was communicated wasn't delivered using the best method. What would have been a better approach? Are there certain people for whom you've found one method works better than others?

Responding Defensively

When emotions flair, it becomes increasingly important to remember that perception is not necessarily intention. Defensive behavior and passive aggressiveness impede effective communication. In order to avoid a communication collapse:

- Stop and check your reaction
- Listen objectively
- Ask questions
- Try not to interrupt
- Get all the information
- Remember – perception is not necessarily intention

Failing to Share Information

The power of knowledge can overcome miscommunication. Sharing information and knowledge is the true way to create powerful working relationships based on fair, productive communication. Sharing knowledge fosters trust.

For Your Consideration:

Think of a time when information wasn't shared with you. How did it impact your ability to be productive?

Does withholding information feel powerful? Why or why not?

How can we feel empowered by sharing information?

Failing to Be Direct

Resolving feelings of conflict and conflict avoidance will help you be a better communicator. When we take in information we make sense of it in the following manner:

- 10% Words
- 30% Tone of Voice
- 60% Body Language

As you can see our non-verbal communication expresses more than our mere words. Therefore you should use your non-verbal abilities to match your words. We should also be careful of jargon. While jargon can convey complex ideas concisely, jargon can also

confuse and create communication collapses if not completely understood. Every industry and every position within that industry uses jargon. Too often this jargon gets in the way of effective communication. So, use language others will understand, speak directly and avoid overly technical words and phrases.

For Your Consideration:

What jargon do you use in your department or field of work?

How can you communicate without the jargon you are comfortable with?

Breaching Confidentiality

Most companies struggle with misinformation or confidential information traveling the grapevine. Every organization struggles with the grapevine from time to time. The grapevine can have a big impact on working relationships and reputation. To maintain confidentiality avoid sharing gossip, stop the grapevine, and ask for confidentiality.

For Your Consideration:

How do you maintain and encourage confidentiality?"

Failing to Listen

Listen actively and attentively to understand the speaker. Be aware of how you are responding to what you are hearing. Don't be consumed with listening with the primary objective being prepared to respond. Set aside internal dialogue and focus on the other person. Be aware of tone of voice and body language and seek understanding of feelings, emotions and words. Check your interpretation of the message

For Your Consideration:

How do you know you're understood?

At what point is it appropriate to respond?

Summary

To avoid communication collapses, keep these points in mind:

- Each person perceives a situation based on his/her reality
- Choose the best communication method
- Respond objectively, not defensively
- Share information that affects the work of others
- Be honest and professional in your communications
- Don't share confidential information
- Listen to fully understand what is being communicated