

Effective Business Communication is a Matter of Paying Attention to the Fundamentals

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How often does this happen? You're in a work-related conversation and you think you have communicated clearly, but realize your words are misunderstood. Or, you are listening to someone else, thinking you are accurately interpreting what they are saying; then later you realize that your interpretation was completely incorrect.

Most people try to consistently be a good communicator, but sometimes we miss the mark. When there is miscommunication, we're baffled. We know that miscommunications can often be costly – wasting time, ruffling relationships, and even damaging our personal or business' bottom line.

What causes communication to go awry? The most obvious answer is that we're human. Oftentimes we have an unintentional lapse in awareness. Sometimes we simply forget the fundamentals of effective communication. Successful communication takes conscious effort. We can't take it for granted. Here's a review of a few of the basics that, amidst our busy life schedules, we may not have thought about in awhile:

Deliver a consistent message. Extensive research has shown that only about seven percent of the spoken message is delivered through actual words. The rest is conveyed non-verbally through voice tone, pitch, and intonation, and even through body language. When speaking, be sure that verbal and non-verbal cues match. And, when you find yourself on the receiving end of a mixed message, ask for clarification.

Focus and show respect. Remember that when it comes to effective communication, multi-tasking is *not* an asset. In mainstream American culture, people still expect eye contact and clear signs of attention. Needless distractions and interruptions erode progress and create tension and even resentments. While focused, respectful communication doesn't always guarantee agreement, it does allow everyone to feel heard and understood. Business communications studies indicate that focused attention is interpreted as a sign of respect. In other words, people want to do business where there is a climate of mutual respect. Employees want to work where they feel heard and valued.

Occasionally, check everyone's perception filter. Everyone has their own unique filtering system to interpret the meaning of what they hear or say. These perceptions are based on such things as opinions, personal biases, and past experiences. During conversations, be sure everyone's perceptions and interpretations are aligned by occasionally paraphrase or summarize what you think has been said. Ask clarifying questions to be sure others are "on the same brain wave" you are on. This is even more critical when the information being discussed is complicated or controversial.



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Communicate cleanly. Every industry has its own set of acronyms and jargon that may sound like a foreign language to outsiders. “Industry-speak” creates barriers to understanding, can appear as a sign of arrogance, and often fosters mistrust. When speaking, define terms and check for understanding. Choose words that enhance understanding and build trust.

Be impeccable with your word. Borrowing the powerful language from Don Miguel Ruiz’s book, *The Four Agreements*, this means consistently saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Customers expect the truth even on the little things. For instance, when they are carelessly given inaccurate information or are promised service they don't receive, they exercise their choice to do business elsewhere.

The truth is that most of us try to be good communicators but over time we may become unconsciously incompetent. Stop occasionally to assess how you communicate – to try to stay consciously competent. This level of awareness can help assure that your business and personal communication supports, rather than deters, your intentions and ultimately your success.



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