

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AT WORK

By Gloria Masters

Have you ever wondered how it is that some people attract loyalty and commitment effortlessly? Or that they make time show an interest in people around them?

If you answered yes, you have just recognised some key attributes effective communicators have, and with a little time and energy spent - you can be one too! There is a misnomer out there that communication is a 'softer' skill and therefore doesn't need attention paying to. In other words, we all communicate and should know how to do this easily. Nothing could be further from the truth. If in doubt, consider these questions:

- Who are the people you feel the most uncomfortable with at work?
- Who is well known to you and others as being difficult to deal with?
- When you consider times of unhappiness at work whose face or faces usually come to mind?

If you found that you had the same names for each - that is not a coincidence. These people are clearly not good communicators, and could be the reason you, and possibly others - would consider leaving your place of work. This area of workplace effectiveness should not be ignored for any longer - the impact poor communication has on others is measurable in terms of motivation, culture and even the amount of sick days taken. Everybody needs to think about what they contribute to their communication at work and each individual needs to consider this: when interacting with others are you leaving them with a brick or a bouquet? If the former is true you need to look at what can be changed so that you are more positive and insightful in your communication.

There are several attributes an effective communicator has - let's see which ones you embody and the ones you feel need your attention:

## Are you?

- Focused
- Perceptive
- Empathic

- Confident
- Encouraging
- A good Listener
- Genuine
- Available
- Positive
- Considerate

The important point is that all of these attributes need to become part of your communication repertoire. For you to succeed in business - realise that 'you do not do business with business you do business with people!' Those same people know what you are like to deal with, so - how do they view you? If that is too hard to answer, then think about aspects of your interactions that you feel good about, and start to recognise the ones you would like to be more effective at. Also look at the other side of the coin and consider the last time you had an unpleasant interchange with someone, because of how they communicated with you. Be aware that you may not always remember exact words said, but what you will never forget is the way they said it, and that is what underpins all communication at work. The impact you have on others!

The way something is stated, a message is delivered or a change is implemented is exactly what people take on board when next they either discuss the situation, have further meetings or interact with you again. If you are considerate and genuine in your communication - people will not mind meeting with you. If on the other hand you are abrupt, dismissive and 'far too important' to worry about the quality of your interactions, you will struggle to garner loyalty and commitment from others. If in doubt think about the teams in your Company that 'work' - I would bet they are run by someone who communicates well. This person will be empathic and genuine in all their dealings with others.



Conversely look at the teams within the work place who never quite seem to gel; there is a higher than normal attrition rate and you hear murmurings about that team leader being difficult to deal with.

So where do you want to be in your communication? Let's add to what you already know by asking others how they see you! To establish this, it is helpful to get feedback from others whom you trust. This could be colleagues, bosses, external clients or stakeholders. Simply ask them their experience of your communication style. If that feels too difficult or imposing, try family/ friends or contact me for a simple test to discover where your skills lie. Another technique is to start today to notice other's body language when you are communicating with them. Recent statistics show, that in any face to face communication, people place 55% importance on body language, 38% on tone of voice and only 7% on the actual words used. Think about that! Be aware that telephone communication is different again, and the rating becomes 82% on tone of voice and only 18% on the actual words used. Astonishing really, when you consider that most of us do not take much notice of others body language! So what should you look for when reading body language?

**Body language** – is the person turned towards or away from you? This could denote disinterest – no matter what words they may be saying to contradict that.

**Voice quality** – Is there tone of voice abrupt and clipped or considerate and engaging? This shows they are prepared to make the time and want to invest in this discussion with you. **Intention** – Are you picking up on good/focused intent or rushed annoyance? This indicates they are too stressed/unwilling to make the situation work – they are leaving it to you. **Manner** – is there a directness/sincerity to this or is it more dictatorial/uncompromising? This can show intolerance for any more time spent on this discussion or task.

**Eye contact** – Do they look away from you/avoid looking at you much, or is there direct eye contact? This can show a willingness to have the best outcome possible with clarity/respect. **Setting** – Is this the most inconvenient time/place to do this? Or is the timing and setting appropriate. This can denote commitment and consideration for both

you and the project. **Sensitivity** – Is this being handled with kindness appropriate to the situation? Or is this just another 'thing' that needs to be completed within a certain time frame? If left unchecked, this can lead to the attrition rate being added to.

**Attitude** – Are you picking up on a genuine willingness and healthy respect for your contribution to this? Or is the opposite true? This indicates difficulty/hard work ahead. **Rapport** – Do you notice there is no interest in building/maintaining a relationship with you? Or that this person takes time to share stories, laugh and discuss other things with you? This shows a healthy/useful working relationship ahead, with lots of value being placed on you!

These are very general guidelines but may show you some things you had seen but not taken on board previously. The key message through this writing is to hold a mirror up to yourself and see just what impact you may be having on others around you. By all means observe other people, but start to notice in yourself when your body language changes and decide to change it for the better. Notice the difference around you when you do. People react to everything whether it is positive or negative. You will begin to get more positive responses from people as you 'lift your game' and be more effective at communicating. Will you always get it right? Will you think you finally have it all conquered? Probably not, but at least you can begin to start thinking more about your impact on others and how they may 'feel' after communicating with you.

Keep in mind, 'People sometimes remember what they said to you - but they always remember what you said to them!'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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