

The Leader Within

By what means can a leader communicate? I came up with a list of over 20 and that wasn't by splitting them up into specific modes. For example "text messaging" doesn't count, being subsumed under "written notes / letters / reports." As another example, one on my list was "expressing appreciation." The loner doesn't need to communicate. The leader must . . . and effectively . . . and not just by spoken words.

In terms of leadership skills, where would you rank "communication"? First? . . . Second? . . . Third? . . . Lower? We may not think deliberately about communication. After all, we've been doing it since the first babblings of childhood and do it every day (even if it's one of those internal conversations in the head).

In our society, we're supersaturated with messages—an abundance of all sorts. That might create real problems for the leader. On one hand, being seduced into taking communication for granted. On the other hand, having his/her expressions become lost (or disregarded) among all the other messages team members are receiving. How can you, as a leader, communicate most effectively?

Communication is, in part, a skill. So, it can be learned and sharpened. The means of communication (as in my 20-plus list) can be given more attention and practiced.

When I was in a high school play, the extras in the background were told to quietly repeat "Rhubarb" so as to give the impression that they were in conversation. Repeating "Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb" with different facial mannerisms and gesticulations was a challenge. We were going through the motions of a conversation, but not saying anything that made sense.

We know from the simple model of Sender—Filters—Receiver—Feedback that the message issued is not the only consideration. Truly sensible messages are clear, understandable, and meaningful to the hearer. There are many kinds of diversity in organizations. Obviously—and perhaps more so in these times—the leader needs to give extra, special attention to how others "hear" him/her.

Referring back to the opening lines about my list of 20-plus means of communication, here's a challenge. By what means can a leader communicate? Compile your own list. If you want to compare lists, send me an e-mail and I will happily share mine with you.

Bret Maukonen

The Coach Within

Think back to your time in elementary and high schools. Did you have courses that focused specifically on teaching you to communicate orally with others in your own language? I expect you remember (perhaps vaguely?) courses on writing, and maybe on speaking a foreign language or two. But what about courses on how to talk to people in a clear, concise, complete fashion in a variety of contexts? I would love to hear from anyone who had that kind of formal training in childhood or adolescence. The lack of preparation in this area is one of my "hot buttons" because I believe that there are few things more crucial to our interpersonal well-being than healthy communication.

An exercise I often use with couples involves having one person make a statement about how he/she is feeling. The other person then reflects back what she/he heard. The first person either confirms or corrects and then, when they are "on the same page," the second person makes a supportive and affirming comment. This process reinforces a number of skills that are basic to good communication—sharing feelings, active listening, reflecting back, clarification and validation.

Chances are there will always be days when your most satisfying conversations will be with yourself! But that doesn't get you "off the hook" from communicating effectively with others. Talking may "come naturally" to most people, but communicating, well—that's a different matter. Ways that coaching helps clients improve their interpersonal communication include developing assertiveness, conflict-resolution skills and the ability to offer positive reinforcement. How confident do you feel in these areas?

One excellent tool that will enhance your ability to communicate with others in a variety of social settings is the Peoplemap™. That was the topic of our May newsletter. Consider the great benefit of learning how to talk to another person's "type"!

We've had tremendous opportunities in our schooling, yet there appears to be an ongoing need to learn how to communicate more effectively. In terms of building positive relationships, there are a few essentials. Effective communication is definitely one of them.

If you want more information, please contact me. We can talk about it!

Lynne Maukonen

To Ponder . . . When have you been on the receiving end of a message that didn't communicate? Why do you think that the message "missed"? When was the last time that you consciously evaluated how effectively you communicate to others? What would you like to work on to become a more effective communicator?