

LMI Journal



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Communication: The Essential Connection

By Paul J. Meyer

Business success depends on the ability to communicate more than ever before with the continuous acceleration of technology and international competition. Effective business communication can make the difference between mediocrity and market leadership. And skillful communication can even make the difference between being employed and not being employed! More than for any other reason, people lose their jobs because of inability to get along with other people. Communication is intricately woven throughout effective and satisfying interpersonal relationships; and relationships are the basis of success in the business world as well as in the home and with friends.

Achieving long-term business goals always requires covering the basics: careful planning, accurate research and preparation, getting the right people together, and obtaining necessary financial and technological resources. Effective communication provides the positive relationships and mutual understanding that are essential for successfully covering these basics; without communication, any project and its potential for future returns evaporate. Businesspeople daily communicate their goals, concerns, performance feedback, and appreciation to those they work with and for. Skillful communication creates the human synergy that turns ideas into profitable ventures.



Communication is the essential human connection — understanding others and being understood. As the essential human connection, skillful communication enables you to meet professional and personal goals. It is the conduit for mutual understanding and change. Without communication, you accomplish only what you can do alone, which inevitably is only a fraction of what you can do in joint effort

with others. Communication – the human connection – is the key to career and personal success.

Rewards of Successful Communication

Good communicators go above and beyond ordinary means and methods of sending messages; they express a unique human touch in their communication. Human behavior experts have long said the most universal need is to understand and to be understood. Insightful and effective communicators meet these most basic human needs when they interact with others.

Consider the profound positive influence you have on people when you understand and communicate effectively with them:

You can:

- Earn their loyalty and respect.
- Help them sort out problems and find solutions.
- Sell them products or services that enhance their life.
- Strengthen their self-image and boost their self-confidence.
- Direct them when they are lost or confused.
- Correct them when they are in

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error. • Encourage them when they are discouraged. • Inspire them to be more than they have been. • Equip them to become happier, better, and more successful. • Influence the course of their life.

Investment of time and energy to skillfully communicate with others always pays rewarding benefits! These rewards are far-reaching and mutually beneficial. New, exciting business goals are reached as communication prevents crisis situations, saves time and effort, enriches relationships, and increases productivity.

What goals have you established that more skillful communication would help you reach? Is the payoff – the reward – of reaching these goals worth the time and effort required? These are questions only you can answer for each goal you have identified as important. Adjustments in your communication style not only help you reach your goals but also allow you to experience the satisfaction of helping others achieve their goals.

Communication Skills Can Be Learned

A common misconception is that some people are “born communicators.” These born communicators supposedly communicate well because they have inborn traits and skills beyond the reach of others. Unfortunately, this erroneous idea discourages many people from attempting to become better communicators, when, in reality, everyone can learn to communicate effectively.

When considering some great contemporary communicators, it would be easy to conclude that people like Ronald Reagan, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Barbara Walters, Lee Iacocca, Margaret Thatcher, and others were born communicators. Yet, each of them had to work hard at perfecting their communication skills. Many other famous communicators from the pages of history overcame severe hindrances to convey their messages to the world. Helen Keller, for example, overcame the crushing dual handicap of blindness and deafness to bear a far-reaching message of courage and hope. From a wheelchair, Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired strength and valor in a whole nation. Winston Churchill suffered from a severe childhood speech impediment that required extensive speech therapy into early adulthood.

The point is that anyone can become a successful communicator. And one who is already a good communicator can become better. Choice, not chance, determines human destiny. Failure to make that choice may result in significant consequences – job failure, loss of money, lack of constructive change, broken relationships, or even the loss

“Investment of time and energy to skillfully communicate with others always pays rewarding benefits!”



of life dreams.

In contrast, for the individual who chooses to become a better communicator, newfound abilities, a wellspring of enthusiasm, and positive relationships are just around the corner. Improved communication and success, of course, never come looking for you. You must work at becoming a better communicator. Identify specific communication skills to develop that will help you reach specific goals. Effective communication enhances productivity in every area of business – planning, goal setting, negotiating, and selling.

Setting Communication Goals

To improve in any area of life, you must move from mere wishing to setting goals and taking action. This is true for any area of your life, and it is true in enhancing your communication ability. Setting communication goals enables you to reach other worthwhile professional and personal goals you have established for yourself. To move ahead, begin now to set specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and tangible goals to improve your communication.

Relate each communication goal to some other worthwhile professional and personal goal you have established for yourself. Improving your communication skills empowers you to climb the ladder of success and even put extensions on that ladder!

Setting goals for improving your communication abilities often involves developing or strengthening certain intangible personality characteristics like empathy and understanding. Setting specific action steps for these kinds of intangible goals is challenging, but possible. In learning empathy, for instance, you can develop creative action steps for integrating this characteristic into your personality.

First, you could choose to begin improving your listening skills. Another step would be to concentrate on learning to ask open-ended questions. To develop empathy, you can ask others about their hopes and dreams, and you can spend time simply observing people and attempting to understand their viewpoints. Identifying specific action steps for personality goals like increasing your capacity for empathy requires commitment and creativity, but these personality goals are the key to becoming an authentic communicator.

Resist the Urge to "Delegate Up"

The whole process of delegation has been compared to moving a monkey from your back to the back of someone else. As a manager, you have the responsibility for getting the work done. The monkey is on your back.

When you delegate, you transfer the monkey to someone else's back. A team member who feels uncomfortable may try to get the monkey to jump back onto your back. You can recognize this process when the person brings the task back to you and says, "What do you want me to do about this?" Because decision making is a new responsibility, it is uncomfortable; the person tries to make the monkey jump onto your back. If you allow this to happen your attempt to delegate has failed. Your team member has lost the opportunity to grow, and you have become entangled in low payoff activities once again.

Take a look at your own behavior in this area. Do you tend to delegate up to the person you report to? When you accept a delegated task, accept the responsibility also.

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Empowerment Through Delegation

Empowering team members is really the process of delegating decision-making authority and responsibility to them. In a business environment of constant change, the need to make decisions quickly and effectively is critical to a leader's success.

An organization that must wait for the leader to make every decision will miss most market opportunities and will quickly fall behind the competition. The more you are able to empower team members with decision-making authority and responsibility, the quicker and more nimble the organization will be in solving problems and exploiting opportunities.

Unfortunately, most leaders do not understand how to effectively empower team members to make decisions. The tendency is to see empowerment as either a black or white issue – either you empower your people or you don't. Actually, empowerment is a process with varying degrees of authority and responsibility.



The amount of empowerment you give to someone will vary depending on the specific decision to be made, the talents of the person, and his or her ability to make effective decisions. There are four distinct levels of delegation and empowerment:

1. Command

This is essentially no empowerment. The leader makes the decision alone and informs team members about the decision.

2. Consultation

At this level the leader asks for input, ideas, and opinions from team members before making a decision.

3. Collaboration

The leader acts more like a member of the team at this level, attempting to reach a consensus that everyone will agree to.

4. Consignment

To consign means to entrust someone with something of value. Consignment is full empowerment, as the leader delegates or entrusts the decision making to team members. There are three levels of consignment: • Make the decision and report immediately. • Make the decision and report at regular intervals. • Make the decision and report when the task or job is finished.

The key to successful empowerment is to choose the appropriate level for each type of decision that needs to be made and for each team member. Remember, however, that there are certain decisions that the leader will always be required to make. Most other decisions should be delegated as soon as possible.

Find Time for Planning and Goal Setting

Powerful timesavers in any undertaking are planning and goal setting. Without them, no amount of activity or hard work ever produces meaningful results or increases your personal productivity. But with them, your efforts propel you toward the progressive realization of your worthwhile, predetermined goals!

The basic challenge in planning and goal setting is finding blocks of uninterrupted time. Interruptions like meetings, day-to-day routine, and the necessity of dealing with all sorts of major and minor crises take up time or break it into such small segments that the connected thought essential for effective planning is difficult or even impossible. Remember, most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes. A bucket with a small hole in the bottom gets just as empty as a bucket that is deliberately kicked over. So, consider all blocks of time – small and large.

With determination, you can find the time you need for planning. Improving your personal productivity depends on it! At the beginning of each week block out specific times to reserve for planning. Mark these on your calendar. Give instructions about how callers are to be handled and what constitutes an emergency worth an interruption. Then follow your plan. An occasional true emergency or unanticipated meeting may alter your schedule. But unless you reserve it and protect it, the time you need for planning will never automatically become available. You do not find time; you schedule it.

As difficult as it sometimes appears to schedule time for planning, a more serious, underlying problem is overcoming the attitudes that frequently stand in the way of reserving time for planning. We are prone to feel uncomfortable unless we are physically “doing” something. We may fear that we are somehow lazy or ineffective unless we are shuffling papers, manipulating objects, or talking about work with other people. We are concerned that someone will catch us sitting apparently idle and conclude that we are “not getting anything done” and have nothing productive to offer the organization. These attitudes are difficult to overcome because they are ingrained by many years of conditioning. But attitudes are merely habits resulting from making repeated choices. You can establish new

attitudes and acquire new habits of thought and action by deliberately making new choices, developing a plan for acting upon those choices, and taking action on that plan — enthusiastically and persistently.

If you experience repeated interruptions in the middle of the time you reserve for planning and goal setting, it will help to consider the time cost of interruptions. An interruption would not be too detrimental if the only cost attached to the interruption were the cost of the actual time required to answer the question or provide the instruction or information requested. But this amount of time is actually a very small portion of the time consumed by the interruption. In addition to the social exchange at both beginning and end of the interruption, you are faced with the necessity for refocusing concentration on the work you were performing when interrupted. Do whatever it takes to diplomatically reduce the number of interruptions threatening your planning and goal-setting time.



Tracking and Feedback

High performance businesses are characterized by continuous improvement. Peak performers in a business are also characterized by continuous improvement. A common denominator of continuous improvement of businesses and individuals is tracking and feedback. Businesses and individual peak performers always use tracking and feedback to improve productivity.

Tracking progress toward the achievement of a predetermined goal provides valuable feedback which enables you to evaluate progress and to make any changes required to reach your goals. Precise, systematic measurement of progress helps you to achieve yet more progress.

Devising a measuring system also forces you to clarify your goals. Measuring progress may reveal that you need to modify your goals or even that you are working on the wrong goals. Remember, if a goal is worthwhile and is also the right one for you, then there are appropriate ways to measure progress toward it.

Tracking progress is the only way to know when you need to take steps to get back on course. Tracking is also the only way to know when you have reached your goal. Establish a practical method for tracking progress and using feedback to improve productivity.

Committing to Organizational Goals

Goal setting is the most powerful tool at your disposal in the development of your organization. Used effectively, goal setting principles can greatly enhance your skill as an effective motivational leader. Throughout history strong leaders and organizations, armed with specific goals and the force of commitment, have shaped the destinies of millions. You and your organization can leave an imprint on the lives of others by setting worthwhile goals and committing to their achievement.

Successful leaders refuse to sit by passively and leave their future to chance or to the choices of others. Effective leaders dare to make their own decisions and to direct their organization toward success. Goals create the confidence that comes from knowing where you and your team are going and how you intend to get there. Goals provide a sense of direction to keep your organization focused on what is important; they serve as a filter to eliminate extraneous demands. Goals bring to life a sense of order and purpose that sustains desire and motivation over a long period of time.



Commit to Organizational Goals

An organizational goals program begins with taking time to dream. Aspirations to become bigger and better, to produce more and achieve higher aims form a magnificent gateway to the future of your organization. All of us were born with unlimited capacity to dream and to see ourselves accomplishing great deeds. Similarly, we possess that same capacity to believe in a better, brighter future for the team and the organization as well.

Some investment of your personal time is required to identify meaningful areas for improvement, to make some changes in organizational attitudes and structures, and to reach team and organizational goals. But the rewards are worth the effort! As you build a goals program to attain your dreams and desires and the dreams and desires of your team members, make these four commitments that will ensure success:

1. A commitment to be completely honest with yourself

and others. Success in a goals program demands full honesty with yourself and with the other members of your organization. Do not hide from unpleasant or disappointing truths. After all, when you begin a journey, you must know the starting point. Together, you and your team members must determine where you currently are in the development of your organization. The point of development you have reached now is just that – a point of growth, a stepping stone toward future improvement.

2. A commitment to set realistically high goals. Set challenging goals that force you and your team members to stretch. High goals require courage. They also carry an

element of risk – the possibility of failure. On the other hand, low goals exert a low motivational impact and result in mediocre progress. Your commitment to setting high goals increases the probability of outstanding success.

3. A commitment to exercise determination in executing your plans. Back up your plans with action! You and your team members must be determined to overcome obstacles, cir-

cumstances, and criticism. Commit yourself to perseverance. Your commitment enables you and your organization to turn your dreams into reality regardless of circumstances.

4. A commitment to believe that your goals will be reached. Belief is an indispensable companion to effective action. When you and your team members believe in yourselves, in your goals, and in your ability to achieve them, you are ready to take the required action steps. Belief can be generated and developed. It is supported by experience as you take action and begin to experience success in reaching organizational goals. Each goal you achieve increases your conviction that you can reach other goals.

These four commitments help sustain your leadership efforts, build emotional involvement in team members, and breathe vitality into your organizational goals program.

Develop the Three Cs of Communication

As you develop the necessary attitudes and skills to communicate, and as you observe the dynamics of communication, you will discover three fundamental characteristics that are crucial to imparting the message you want to send. These basic qualities of communication include: character, credibility, and courage.

Respect for the dignity of all human beings is recognized worldwide as the backbone of communication. This important concept can be summarized in the word **character**. Character is the plumb line or the golden rule of communication. Character is integrity; it is doing what you say you will do. Walk your talk. Cooperative action can occur when people believe they can trust you. The ancient philosopher Aristotle recognized this when he said, "Character is the most effective agent of persuasion."

Character is of central importance in all human interaction. Character earns respect. People have confidence and trust in you. As a result, character effectively keeps lines of communication open. People judge your character by such factors as:

- Your attitude toward yourself and others
- What you say and the way you say it
- Your mannerisms
- Your voice, posture, and facial expressions
- Your associates
- Your demonstrated actions over a period of time.

A firm commitment to character simplifies communication. As politician Sam Rayburn once said, "Always tell the truth. Then you'll never have to remember what you said the last time." Strengthen your character, and it will serve you well as you face opportunities to communicate with employees and colleagues alike. Character has the potential to impact your goals even further along your journey than you can now see. The impact of character on your goals is captured by these lines:

Sow a thought, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny.



The next C, **credibility**, is closely related to character. Credibility, or believability, is established by a commitment to quality, competence in your field of expertise, and continuous professional and personal improvement.

Through consistent attitudes and actions and a positive work record, you prove that you are credible and trustworthy. Work consistently and diligently to build a positive, consistent track record. Establish your credibility, and you are positioned to communicate effectively and prosper in your business. People want to associate and cooperate with you when they believe you are capable and credible.

Courage is the third C of communication. Authentic, effective communication is not for the timid. Communication requires courage! Dealing with unpleasantness, coping with conflict, and taking a firm stand when it is needed demand courage. Communicating effectively in sensitive or potentially explosive situations calls for courage. In business, one must have courage about a procedure, a strategy, or a personal issue. In social circles, one must have courage about religion or politics; and at home, one must have courage about personal feelings and expectations.

Listening sometimes requires more courage than any other aspect of communication. It takes courage to receive criticism. Yet people who truly want to grow and develop welcome comments by their critics; they are open to the criticism of others and weigh it against other considerations. They recognize the fact that people seldom improve when their only yardstick is their present stated achievement. Listening to criticism offers invaluable benefits. You can make needed changes as a result of criticism from others more than from their praise.

When you are courageous enough to truly listen to others, you make yourself vulnerable by being open to constructive criticism from them. You also take the risk of others not appreciating, understanding, or valuing your ideas. But the alternative – not communicating at all – only protects the status quo and offers no prospects for change and progress. Courage – personal security to communicate effectively as a receiver as well as a sender of messages – is a commitment to win-win outcomes and a sign of real leadership.

Productivity: Invest Your Time Wisely

Time is your most valuable current asset because your productivity is a direct measure of how wisely you invest your time. Productivity is influenced by government regulations, competition, current economic conditions, and other factors over which you have little direct control. But time is the one resource over which you can exert the most control to increase your personal productivity.

Good time organization cannot give you more time, but it can help you use time much more productively than you have in the past. Making improvements in any sphere of your professional life requires change. There is a time-proven saying, "If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always gotten." Before you can take action to become more productive, you must define precisely what "productivity" means in your particular position or organization. In a general sense, productivity means doing the right thing, in the right way, and for the right length of time. As you work with your team members, or possibly your accountant, to determine a useful definition, you will find that your use of time is a major determinant of your productivity.

Many people who would be horrified at the idea of wasting either personal or company assets in the form of supplies, raw materials, transportation, or inefficient production methods think nothing of using a significant amount of their valuable time to accomplish tasks worth only a fraction of that amount. Productivity depends upon establishing specific understandings about the value of time.

1. The time at your disposal is your entire time capital. You cannot borrow time; you cannot hoard it; you cannot even work hard and earn more time. All you can do is invest the time you have. What you get in return for time invested is the measure of your effectiveness in using your time capital. Your productivity is a direct measure of how wisely you invest your time.
2. You cannot afford the luxury of wasted time. Time, productively used, is money. Identifying 30 to 40 minutes that you now waste every day and spending it productively will add the equivalent of approximately 22 eight-hour work days to your productive time every year. Using that small amount of time constructively each day amounts to almost an entire extra month of productivity. Think how much this would add to your productivity!



To reveal a clear picture of the worth of your time, determine the value of an average hour of your working time. Every hour you spend on a task is a direct investment of that amount of money. How many of the tasks you accomplish each day are actually worth this rate of pay?

When you have determined the value of an hour of your time, you can make some judgments about how to use each one for maximum productivity and profit. First, examine all the activities that make up your day. Decide which of these is worth less than the time you must invest to accomplish it. Then decide whether that particular activity should be eliminated, simplified, or delegated to someone whose time costs less than yours. Reserve your valuable time for activities meriting that rate of investment.

When you understand the worth of your time, you are better able to concentrate your efforts on items that offer the highest payoff. As a result, you accomplish more of the important objectives that bring high profit. You avoid wasting time and increase your personal productivity immensely when you understand the real value of your time.

Understanding the worth of your time and setting specific goals for its wise use pay dividends in two ways:

1. *More productivity, or achievement, in the same number of hours.* By concentrating on items actually worth your attention, your personal productivity increases with no increase in the number of hours invested.
2. *The same productivity, or achievement, in fewer hours.* Understanding the worth of your time reveals appropriate items to eliminate, to simplify, or to delegate. You can maintain the present level of productivity in fewer hours. The hours freed from detail are then available for a personally enriched life in whatever area has meaning for you.

Improving personal productivity offers immense benefits. You accomplish more in less time. You achieve more results than you ever dreamed possible. Improving your productivity creates opportunities for you to stretch your abilities and use more of your potential.

Increasing personal productivity means more control over your life and all that matters to you. It means a higher standard of living, shorter work hours, and increased time for the pursuit of other worthwhile goals that are important to you.

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