

LMI Journal



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Improve Productivity with Communication

By Paul J. Meyer

Business leaders often state that one of the greatest needs in the workplace is people who can communicate. Once goal setting and planning are accomplished, goals and plans must be communicated to others whose cooperation is needed. Effective communication unifies employees and their work to the overall purpose and direction of the organization. Through communication, you raise your organization's levels of energy, enthusiasm, and productivity!

Mastering the art of communication is a complex process demanding time and ongoing effort. But choosing to continually improve your communication skills increases your productivity dramatically and the productivity of those around you. As you communicate, you reap these valuable results:

- Satisfying relationships with others;
- Well-coordinated, goal-directed work activity;
- New ideas;
- Agreement on shared priorities;
- Avoidance of costly mistakes; and
- Increased profits and marketplace competitiveness as employees take action on important messages.

EMPATHY IN COMMUNICATION

Communication is the exchange of ideas between two people for the purpose of eliciting some kind of action. Most

often, we think of communication as expressing our ideas to someone else. That is one part of it, but not all. William James, known as the founder of modern psychology, said that the greatest human need is to be understood and appreciated. To meet that need, effective communicators must understand others before trying to influence them.

Successful communication is a two-way process. You must present your ideas in a form others can understand, and you must, in turn, listen to others to understand how your message is received. Such mutual understanding is necessary if the purpose of any communication is to be achieved.

Understanding others depends upon empathy. Empathy is the ability to look at a situation from the viewpoint of another and understand that person's feelings and beliefs. Empathy is closely associated with most of the skills usually labeled as human relations skills, or the ability to get along with people. Empathy recognizes the inherent right of each person to hold personal views. Understanding another's feelings and beliefs does not mean that you are forced to agree with or accept that point of view. Such understanding is the basis of sensitivity to the needs of others, flexibility in dealing with those needs, and fairness and objectivity in helping others fulfill their needs.

Undoubtedly, you have heard it said, "Put yourself in the other person's place." However, for a deeper level of



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empathy, do more than imagine yourself in the other person's place; imagine what it is like to be the other person – with that person's individual personality, desires, fears, and dreams – in that situation. Knowing what you would do is not enough; empathy is imagining how the other person feels.

Empathy is basic to at least four principles of effective communication:

Organize your ideas. Even the most disorganized people have some order in their thought processes. Present your ideas in an organized way, and others comprehend them better. First, be sure your ideas and your thinking are crystal clear to you. Write them down. Organize them in light of what you know about others. When you are absolutely certain you have organized your own ideas, you can be more confident they will be understood and accepted.

Tap into people's interests. People are constantly bombarded by sights, sounds, and ideas competing for attention. A pattern of habits and attitudes affects their acceptance of ideas that seem to promise satisfaction of their needs. Empathy allows you to present your message in a form that fits into the existing pattern. When you understand other people's interests and phrase your ideas in those terms, you communicate effectively.

Paint a picture. Some words suggest logic. They appeal to reason and fact. Other words appeal to emotions, to desires, and to needs. Words of both logic and emotion can contribute to painting pictures of ideas. Recognize the needs of others and express your ideas in words that form a mental picture that promises to supply those needs. Word pictures engage both the mind and emotion of the listener to produce a lasting impression.

Vary your communication style. To motivate or to influence someone else, use the communication style most comfortable and familiar to that person. Adjust your style to enable the listener to understand and accept your message without the need to "translate" it into a more acceptable style. When working with a team, be aware of the communication styles that are different from yours and capitalize upon the strengths of those differences.

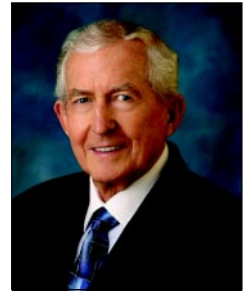
CLARIFYING WITH EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

Promote two-way communication by asking effective questions. Ask questions to bring answers that give you a genuine understanding of the viewpoint of others. When you demonstrate empathy through asking questions and genuinely listening, others feel valued and respected. You also gain valuable information you can use later to make informed decisions.

When your primary aim in a conversation is to draw out information, begin by asking easy questions. Questions that are easy to answer relax the other person and dissolve

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– Paul J. Meyer



tension. When you demonstrate your willingness to listen and remain nonjudgmental, you obtain more information and build a positive relationship for future communication.

The type of question that produces active involvement of the listener is the open-ended question. An open-ended question cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. Open-ended questions begin with phrases like these:

- “How do you feel about . . .?”
- “What do you think . . .?”
- “Why . . .?”
- “What happened?”

Open-ended questions go beyond extracting basic information to . . .

- Identify problems,
- Uncover underlying feelings, attitudes, and needs, and
- Encourage the sharing of valuable suggestions and solutions.

Become expert at asking open-ended questions that encourage people to tap into their own creative resources. Be patient as you improve your questioning skills in routine conversations. As you learn more about your team members, your communication reaches far beyond the level of basic information exchange. An amazing amount of information can be gained from asking open-ended questions that inspire people to select relevant information, form personal opinions, develop new methods and ideas, and reveal underlying emotions.

LISTENING FOR THE TOTAL MESSAGE

When you ask a question, listen attentively to the answer. Listen for the total message. Listen to the words themselves, to the manner of delivery, and to what is not said. Ten percent of communication comes through words, 30 percent by sounds, and 60 percent by body language. Observe and evaluate body language, emotion, attitudes, and any other apparent external or internal factor.

Because it is one of the master human relations skills, effective listening is worth the time it takes to refine and polish. Listening multiplies the value of the information you receive. You gain a reputation for courtesy and concern – traits that enhance your leadership and effectiveness.

Commit to a Shared Vision

It is not enough just for leaders to have an exciting vision, it must be a vision shared by all team members.

The only way to achieve true commitment to the vision is to include people in the creation and formation of that vision. This doesn't mean that everyone gets to decide what the vision will be, but everyone should have the opportunity to voice his or her ideas.

Since the purpose of vision is to inspire motivation, foster commitment, build trust, and generate alignment in the actions of team members, it is vitally important to include team members in the process.

The key to inclusion is communication. Research shows that after appreciation and recognition, what people want most at work is to "feel a part of things." Team members want to know what is happening in the organization and how it affects them. The more information you can give to team members the better.

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David Byrd
President, LMI

Focus on What You Can Do!

Coach John Wooden, one of the greatest coaches to ever coach the game of basketball, was reported to have consistently encouraged his players to **"Never let what you can't do get in the way of what you can do."** In other words, focus on your **Strengths** by capitalizing on what you **"Can do."**

In challenging economic times I have noticed a tendency of some leaders to focus on weaknesses rather than building on strengths. Sometimes without thinking we engage in endless meetings to discuss options and progress only to waste precious time debating all the things we **"Can't do."** The reality is the things that we cannot do will always block our progress. A more effective way of addressing challenging circumstances is to focus like a laser on strengths and the things that can be done.

Here is an example of a simple technique I have used successfully in promoting a positive, can-do, solutions-oriented, leadership environment: The next time you find yourself in a meeting that is going nowhere ask everyone to shift their focus to a discussion of all the things your team can do, right now, that would positively impact the particular problem at hand. I think you will be pleased and enlightened by the results. I have experienced that this simple little technique will turn a meeting around fast. Why? Because the leadership focus has been shifted from problems to solutions.

Having access to the information related to the problem is a vital leadership requirement, but the leadership focus should always be related to the immediate solutions available. **The most efficient way to access immediate solutions is to focus on what you can do right now.** As effective leaders we can never allow "What we can't do get in the way of what we can do!"

Leadership direction is a bi-product of focus. In an effective, solutions-oriented, leadership environment you cannot afford to waste time being directed by the things you cannot do. Focus on what you can do, and you will find your team effectively addressing the problem.

Until Next Time,

David Byrd
President, Leadership Management Institute™

Developing People: Principles of Growth

Effective leaders function as developers of people. The best leaders know that development takes place only when growth and change occur. To better develop the potential of your team members, understand and apply these basic principles of growth:

Principle One: TEAM MEMBERS MUST BENEFIT

Emphasize the benefits team members will enjoy as a result of developing their potential for success; show how they will profit, either directly or indirectly, from personal development. People grow most when they see a reason for developing their potential for achievement. In the competitive marketplace for talent, people gravitate to organizations that offer the most opportunities to develop their personal and professional abilities. The most meaningful development always depends on the team members' interest and cooperation. Let them know that you do not expect them to learn new and complex skills all at once, but encourage them to believe in their own abilities to succeed.

Principle Two: FEEDBACK ENHANCES GROWTH

Team members must know the results they are achieving before they can improve upon their performance. Devise a system to let people know what they do particularly well and what needs improvement. Specific feedback minimizes errors, speeds the learning rate, and guarantees more satisfactory growth. Provide encouragement and support when performance is unsatisfactory. Give appropriate praise and recognition at every successful step forward to reinforce personal development.

Principle Three: PEOPLE LEARN BEST THROUGH APPLICATION

Ideas, concepts, and theories are great to learn and know. But if ideas are never put into practice, what value do they really have? Your growth and development plan must include how team members will apply what they learn.



Reading books and newsletters, attending seminars, or watching an expert on a particular skill can be very entertaining, but if the ideas never improve productivity or results, they are just a waste of time and money. Be cautious about investing in information or experiences, instead put your resources into application and measurable results.

Principle Four: ACHIEVE LONG-TERM GROWTH THROUGH THE USE OF SPACED REPETITION

Development naturally occurs when practice is provided at regular intervals and repeated over a period of time, rather than concentrated all at once. Research has shown that in just a few weeks people will forget up to 98 percent of what they hear or read only one time. Important to all learning and personal growth, the principle of spaced repetition helps break old habits and establish new, productive behaviors.

Principle Five: MEASURE RESULTS

Investing in the development of your people is like any other investment — you should expect a return on your investment. Developing team members can be one of the most profitable investments an organization makes. Unfortunately, too many organizations spend money on learning and training without ever measuring the results and return on their investment. Failure to measure results causes organizations to continue to waste financial resources on ineffective programs.

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Directing Others with Authority and Power

Empowerment of people is a primary goal of leaders within organizations today. Far from being a fad, empowering workers at all levels is a means of coping with the challenges and problems of today's fast-paced business environment. Empowerment means not so much giving people power, but recognizing the power they have and unleashing it to help the organization operate more effectively. To maximize empowerment of people, understanding the principles of power and authority is vital, and the need to use power and authority skillfully is greater than ever.

Authority and power are so closely allied that it's difficult to discuss one without also discussing the other. Leadership authority is often difficult to define precisely, but this definition fits most situations:

Authority is the right vested in a position to accomplish the goals of the organization through management of the time and effort of other people.

Authority, then, implies that as a leader you have a right to direct the activities of team members. Power, on the other hand, is based on the relationship leaders develop with the members of their team:

Power is influence, derived from the respect and trust developed by an individual, and is based on relationships developed with others.

By accepting a position within the organization, workers recognize the authority of the owners and their appointed representatives – the leaders. Over the past century, however, workers and their unions have asserted their own rights and responsibilities. Leaders at all levels have become increasingly sensitive to the collective wishes of employees.

No matter how much authority top leadership delegates to you, the ability to exercise that authority essentially comes from you. No one else can give you that ability – it comes from within. That ability is called power. While power can be withheld or prevented by top leadership, it cannot be automatically granted by executive order. It is possible for leaders to have authority because of their title, but they may lack any real power to exercise it. Lack of power may be a result of the leader's own personal qualities, or waning influence may stem from unrealistic constraints imposed by top leadership.

Power is built over a period of time through multiple complex actions and reactions between you and your team



members. It is primarily a function of your personal competence and credibility. While power is sometimes tenuous and fluctuating, it does tend to grow and stabilize as you demonstrate your integrity in its use. Power and authority are extremely important because they provide you with a practical means for achieving organizational goals through leading the effort and productivity of other people.

Obstacles to

Empowerment

A leader can only grow by helping team members grow and develop. Leaders must be aware of the fears that prevent them from delegating and empowering team members and work to overcome these fears. Following are the primary fears that prevent people from delegating and empowering others:

Fear of losing authority. Many leaders view delegating or empowerment as giving away their authority or power to others. True empowerment gives team members the opportunity to get results on their own. When this happens, leaders will sometimes feel that they are losing control of the work. Since the leader is still responsible for the results, he or she becomes hesitant to give up this control. In reality, effective empowerment can only help the leader and expand his or her authority and power in the organization.

Taking too much time. Some leaders think investing the time needed to train, coach, and support their team members is a luxury they don't have. Certainly there is an upfront investment of time and energy to develop team members so they can take on more responsibility. Over the long term, however, this investment actually saves considerable time for the leader and the entire organization.

Fear of failure. Many leaders lack confidence either in themselves or in their team members; consequently, they are hesitant to delegate important responsibilities to others. Certainly a leader should not delegate responsibilities just for the sake of delegation, but it's important that the leader is willing to take small risks by empowering others with certain responsibilities. The best way to overcome this fear is with a clear process of delegating to others as well as following up, tracking and evaluating the outcomes from that delegation. This allows the leader to keep his or her finger on the pulse of the work while still giving responsibility for the work to team members.

Examine the Time Span of Goals

Goal setting is the strongest human force for self-motivation. But not all goals have equal power of self-motivation. Some are more important than others. Some are close at hand; others are far away – almost lost in the future. Some goals point toward things; others involve the achievement of high purpose or development of various traits of character. Some are clear and vivid; others are nebulous and difficult to define. Until you bring some kind of order, sequence and priority into the mass of dreams that constitutes your collection of goals, even those close at hand are difficult to achieve. The human mind is such an orderly, systematic computer that it refuses to function under chaotic conditions.

THE TIME SPAN OF GOALS

At the moment you reach an important goal, your confidence and enthusiasm are so great you feel that you can conquer the world. Short-range goals are great confidence builders. Nothing succeeds like success. The shorter the range of a goal, the stronger your motivation to achieve it.

The achievement of a short-range goal elevates you a step higher and broadens your vision. Goals that you could not even see yesterday now come into view; and with each accomplishment, you see more and more because you stand on a higher plateau. Short range is not to be confused with unimportance. There is no such thing as a goal without a challenge. A short-range goal is short in terms of the time span involved, not the effort put forth to reach it.

The length of time that you consider short depends upon your experience in goal setting, your ability to visualize the future, and the clarity with which you can see each step that will be required to reach a particular goal. In other words, a short-range goal is one that can be attained in a period of time that seems short to you. As you gain experience in setting and achieving goals, your ability to visualize the future expands and what seems like a long period of time today may seem short five years from now.

Short-range goals are important because they give you quick experience in setting and achieving goals. But short-range goals are primarily intended to serve as intermediate building blocks that, together, lead to the achievement of your long-range goals. Personal leadership provides you with a high degree of foresight, vision, perception, and courage to set long-range goals based upon your ultimate purpose and your personal sense of values. You must be able to see beyond tomorrow to next



year, the next decade, or even the next generation. But you are not satisfied with merely seeing it; you plan for it. You set long-range goals and work toward them.

As you begin to develop your goal-setting program, you may find that long-range goals seem to have little power to motivate you. The motivation to reach them can be developed by setting goals for progressive intermediate steps that ultimately lead to the long-range goal.

Two young people who are classmates in law school, for example, may seem to have similar long-range goals – a law degree. Early in their educational careers, these young people may have seen the law degree as a long-range goal. As they graduate and begin to establish careers, they may not be able to visualize clearly their ultimate goals. They see only a general, nonspecific picture. Perhaps one wants to be in politics, and the other wants to be a judge. At one time, the law degree was all they could visualize, but as they progress, they begin to see the next step. The young lawyer who is interested in politics may not be able to visualize himself as a United States Senator. He can, however, see himself as Assistant District Attorney in his city. Later he sees additional progressive steps that ultimately lead to his election to the Senate. The young law graduate who is interested in the judiciary system may begin as a junior member of a law firm to gain experience. As she learns and achieves new goals, she eventually wins an appointment or

an election as a judge in her county or district. Ultimately she could qualify for appointment to the Supreme Court in her state or even in the nation.

Every journey begins with a single step. A carefully

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planned series of intermediate steps can make any long-range goal seem more concrete and realistic.

Motivation: A Personal and Internal Force

The process of motivation involves both the effect – the observable behavior – and the cause – the reason behind the behavior. Although needs, desires and drives are fairly universal, people choose to follow widely different paths to satisfy needs or to reach goals. Two people may adopt identical behaviors to reach opposite goals, or they may behave in opposed ways to achieve the same goal.

The available patterns of behavior are infinite. Observe the behavior patterns of others, remembering that their actions are only a means to an end. You can interpret behavior correctly only if you know something about the goals your team members are attempting to reach.

Behavior arises from needs that must be satisfied. When needs become conscious wants, they produce actions. When you can identify their personal needs, you can help people translate needs into personal goals. It is then possible to help them blend their goals with those of the organization. Consequently, both the organization and the individual benefit from purposeful activity. The basis for this blending of goals must be communicated clearly to team members. They must see how they can benefit personally by contributing to achievement of the organization's goals. When it becomes obvious that contributing to the attainment of organizational goals also directly affects the success of their individual goals, personal motivation is in operation.

Although the two are often confused, motivation is not manipulation. No outside force can be applied to people to make them do what they otherwise would not choose to do. You may trick people into acting a certain way or set up a series of alternatives that leave no attractive options; but when you do that, you have created a type of negative motivation. Even then, however, people choose. They weigh the consequences of conformity and of rebellion, and then decide what to do in terms of their own needs and values. The benefits of manipulation are short-lived. People feel uncomfortable and problems multiply.

You can lead and inspire self-motivation in people indefinitely, but you cannot manipulate them for very long. Since motivation depends upon internal choices, you can ignite motivation in people only by understanding them and helping them to open up and seek the growth that will make them more effective and more successful.

Each person is an integrated whole. There is no such thing as an isolated “inner person” and separate “outer person.” Each person is a whole being, determined by a complex blending of inner forces that meet and interact with external influences.

Your responsibility is to learn what you can about the internal forces of people, the forces that are beyond your control, and then blend them harmoniously with the external situations that you can affect. Your success in leading people is determined by the extent to which you influence people to choose behavior favorable to the organization – behavior that is, at the same time, consistent with their internal needs.

Challenges for Leaders

Leaders and managers are finding that the methods of motivation that worked a few short years ago no longer have the same impact. For an example, when people have plenty to eat, the desire for food is no longer a strong motivator for them. Study after study has shown a huge discrepancy between what leaders and managers think people want at work and what people really do want. Leaders must set aside their assumptions about team members and instead truly get to know them and their desires.

Fewer and fewer people are motivated only by their physical and security needs. More and more people are looking to satisfy their higher-level esteem and self-fulfillment needs. People want more. People want to find purpose and meaning in their work, not just spend their days earning a living. People want to develop and use more of their potential, not just watch the clock and put in the minimum effort required.

To become a truly motivational leader, it is imperative that you recognize the internal needs of your people. As a leader, it is your responsibility to help team members satisfy these needs and desires in your organization. If your team members can find respect, meaning, and purpose in their work, you will tap into their creativity, imagination, and the huge reservoir of untapped potential that most organizations never see. This is a competitive advantage that is virtually impossible to match or duplicate. Motivational leadership is truly the most effective and shortest route to results and organizational success.



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