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Communicate Effectively

24 Lessons for Day-to-Day Business Success

THE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK FOR
ENHANCING CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

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McGraw Hill

"Some things haven't changed: human nature and the need to interact effectively. To achieve excellence as a manager, interpersonal skills are essential."

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"The people who've made the most positive impression on me and who've had the most positive influence on others as well all share one quality. They're excellent communicators."

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Communicate Effectively

24 Lessons for Day-to-Day Business Success

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Contents

☑ *Communication requires care*

Communicating has never been faster or easier. We have cell phones, pagers, voice mail, e-mail, faxes, videoconferencing, and Internet chat rooms.

With all this technology, we can now communicate with almost anyone anywhere at any time.

But are we communicating any better? In our workplaces, groups are frequently hampered by conflicts resulting from poor communication. Misunderstandings occur. Misinformation spreads. Issues arise. Problems grow.

Everywhere we go, we find so many problems that we would have to agree with that famous line from the classic movie *Cool Hand Luke,* "What we've got here is [a] failure to communicate."

And many of our failures are because of how we communicate. It has never been more important to succeed at communicating than it is now.

Solutions to many unnecessary and serious problems lie in improving our ability to interact with others—in communicating more effectively. To manage well, you must communicate well. It's as simple as that. Managing is all about working with people, about

helping them fulfill their responsibilities, about helping them collaborate or at least coexist successfully.

The objective of communication is quite simply to create, maintain, and/or develop a connection between and among people.

The objective of this book is to help you do that better.

And it's not just about you. Because you manage people, you have the opportunity to apply management by modeling. Like it or not, you're a behavioral model. The people you manage expect more from you because you're a manager. Among other things, they expect you to communicate well. If you do, you can inspire them to communicate better. If you do not, you will influence them in other ways, with negative consequences.

Read with an open mind and an open heart, and put what you learn into practice. You will be communicating more effectively.

"When you're in a position of leadership—be it first-line supervisor or chief executive—you're a behavioral model. Employees look up to you and take cues from you."

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☐ Command and control

☑ *Connect with people*

*I*f you manage people, most of your work activities involve *communicating.* Your effectiveness depends in large part on your relational or interpersonal skills.

The following four factors of growing importance make strong interpersonal skills a job requirement for any manager:

- *Technology:* As John Naisbitt cautioned in *Megatrends* (1982), "Whenever new technology is introduced into society, there must be a counter-balancing human response—that is, *high touch.*"
- *Time intensity:* We do more work in less time by multitasking. But don't let multitasking keep you from paying attention to your employees and communicating completely, accurately, and effectively.
- *Diversity:* There are more and more differences among people in workplaces—age, gender, ethnicity, culture, politics, religious beliefs, language, and lifestyle. To be most effective, you must be sensitive to those differences.
- *Liability:* Many work issues that result in legal action could have been resolved when they surfaced—if the managers had handled them appropriately. That requires effective communication.

Communicate constructively. These principles—the ABCs of constructive communication—form the foundation of productive relationships, better morale, and more effective teamwork.

- **A**pproach in a positive manner. Be pleasant and gracious. Be well prepared. Be respectful, be reasonable, and convey confidence.

1

- **B**uild bridges of understanding and cooperation, based on trust and commonalities. People must feel safe—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Your communication behaviors should convey the message, "You're safe with me." People relate better when they have things in common, a feeling of sharing. Develop commonalities.
- **C**ustomize your communications. Adapt your mode of communicating to the mode the other person prefers, the mode that works best.

Here are three more recommendations:

Don't label people: Labeling affects how you think about them, how you approach them, and how you communicate. If, for example, you think of someone as a "troublemaker," that negative thought shows in how you approach him or her and how you interact. Also, people tend to live up—or down—to our expectations.

Build trust through consistency: We tend to trust people who act consistently. How consistent are you? On a sheet of paper write, "People can count on me to . . ." and then list things you do consistently. Which of those consistent behaviors build trust? Which undermine trust?

Avoid the John Wayne style of management: Control-and-command is outdated and ineffective. For better results, elicit cooperation rather than demand compliance. However, emergency or crisis situations call for you to take charge and for your employees to follow your directions.

The Bottom Line

> *"Interpersonal communication means building bridges. When you interact—with employees, your boss, or peers—your objective is to build bridges of positive, productive working relationships."*

☑ *Manage perceptions*

***P**erceptions* are powerful. To communicate effectively, you must consider how others will perceive your message.

Communication training commonly refers to two roles: sender and receiver. *Perceiver* would be a more accurate term because it emphasizes that perceptions are crucial in every communication.

When you speak or write, you send a message and the other person receives it, processes it through his or her frame of reference, and forms perceptions. That frame of reference is formed by many factors:

- ■ Attitude
- ■ Beliefs
- ■ Culture
- ■ Education
- ■ Emotions
- ■ Experience
- ■ Gender

Each frame of reference is different. Each produces different perceptions, which generate different impressions and reactions.

We process messages into perceptions instantly and usually subconsciously. We form impressions, make judgments, and come to conclusions automatically.

Whenever you communicate, people form perceptions. Those perceptions determine how they react.

Perception is more powerful than fact. We respond to messages based on what we perceive to be true, more than on what may be

true in fact. If the facts differ from our perception, perception—how we interpret the facts—wins out. We respond to our impressions and interpretations.

Managing is producing results through others. People are much more inclined to do their best when they have positive perceptions of you and your messages.

You don't know what people are thinking—and you certainly don't control what they are thinking. You can't manage how someone processes what you communicate. But you can manage how you communicate—by written, vocal, and visual cues.

The better you understand their frames of reference, the more effectively you can communicate with people. Try the following three suggestions:

Time your message: Timing is everything. Emotions affect how we perceive things. If you're going to ask for something or bring up a sensitive subject, don't do it when the person is in a bad mood. Wait until the mood improves; he or she will be more receptive.

Start from the other's perspective: Managers and employees typically have different perspectives—another factor that affects perceptions. Employees may form inaccurate perceptions simply because they don't have the bigger picture the way you do. Either communicate from their perspective or provide information about the bigger picture.

Be sensitive to personal differences: People differ by age, gender, ethnicity, culture, politics, religious beliefs, language, lifestyle, and so on. Be sensitive to how differences could affect perceptions of you and your message. Be attentive to your words, tone, gestures, and mannerisms.

The Bottom Line

"Perception is all there is—manage it!"

—Tom Peters, The Pursuit of WOW!

☑ *Choose words with care*

Verbal cues are words that elicit or produce a response. In writing, word choice and style are crucial. On the phone, verbal cues work with vocal cues. Face to face, visual and vocal cues generally have a greater impact than do verbal cues only.

Many of us use words without thinking about their effect. But we should avoid using words that generate negative perceptions and reactions:

- *Demanding* words—like, *"You have to . . . ,"* *"You must . . . ,"* *"I insist . . . ,"* and, *"You'd better . . . or else"*—make people feel that they have no choice.
- *Demeaning* words—like *stupid, dummy, jerk, nerd,* and *bimbo*—hurt. They also discourage and demotivate.
- *Discriminatory* words—inappropriate references to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, disabilities, and so on—are wrong and may even be illegal.
- *Profanities* are inappropriate in the workplace, especially for managers.
- *Negative* words—like *no* and *can't*—stir up negative feelings. Try to say things in a positive way.

Here's the bottom line: Before you speak, think, "If someone said that to me, what would I perceive?"

Also, avoid words and phrases that are overused—like "challenges and opportunities" and sports or military metaphors. They often make little or no impression. Use buzzwords judiciously.

5

Keep in mind this language guideline: "You before I." Humans are basically self-centered. So phrase things from the perspective of the other person. Instead of saying, "I'm pleased with the job you did," say, "You did an excellent job." Instead of saying, "I have a good idea," say, "You may like this idea." Instead of saying, "I need a favor," say, "You'd be doing me a favor if . . . ."

Here are three guidelines for using verbal cues:

Talk straight: Make your message easy to understand. Be straightforward without seeming blunt. Don't mince words or talk around a topic as though you're trying to avoid the subject.

Be specific: Avoid words that vary in meaning according to personal perceptions like *many, some, seldom, often, substantial, little, ASAP*, and so on. And don't use absolutes like *nothing, never,* and *always* unless you mean them absolutely. Generalizations are often just lazy language.

Be courteous: To manage perceptions, you think not only about how people perceive your message, but also how they perceive you. You'll promote more positive perceptions when you communicate courteously. Use those simple but significant words: *please, thank you, you're welcome, may I?* and *excuse me.* Say them with a smile and sincerity.

The Bottom Line

"When there's a disparity between what people perceive to be true and what is true in fact, which usually carries the greater weight? Perception. Their perception is their truth. And anything else is seen as a lie."

☐ Speak naturally

☑ *Control your voice*

Vocal cues are the characteristics of a voice that elicit or produce a response. Face to face, vocal cues account for more than a third of the meaning in a message. On the phone, they account for even more.

We can change our rate of speech, pitch, volume, and tone. These characteristics are sometimes influenced by circumstances. That's natural—but you should try to manage your vocal cues.

If you speak rapidly, people may think you're nervous or in a hurry. Talking fast can sometimes send the message, "I don't have time for you." When you talk fast, people may stop listening or suspect that you don't want them to understand.

If you talk very slowly, people may assume that you're thinking slowly or, if you carefully enunciate every word, being condescending.

A high-pitched voice is commonly associated with immaturity. A low-pitched voice can sound gruff. People tend to associate vocal qualities with personal qualities. Vocal power conveys strength of character. A firm and resonant voice creates the perception of a steady, mature personality.

Adjust your *volume* to the situation. When you're speaking one on one in close quarters, lower your voice. If you're talking to a group in a large room without a microphone, raise it. In normal circumstances, talking loudly seems harsh, even aggressive, and speaking softly is likely to suggest that the speaker is timid or shy.

Tone can put people at ease—or on guard. Whiney, defensive, demanding, antagonistic, menacing, or sarcastic tones create negative perceptions.

7

If you use negative tones with employees, some of them will do the same. Then you've got problems when interactions are riddled with tones that hurt and affect collaboration.

Here are three suggestions for improving your vocal cues:

Speak moderately with variations in most situations: "Moderately" means that the rate is neither too fast nor too slow, the pitch is neither too high nor too low, the volume is neither too loud nor too soft, and the tone is reasonable, calm, and composed. In other words, no extremes.

Vary your rate, pitch, volume, and tone appropriately: Avoid a monotone. Modulate your voice to express the feelings behind your words.

Use dynamics for effect: Alert people to pay more attention to your words. Ever so subtly, lower the pitch, slow the rate, and speak more softly when you make a point. Then pause. A moment of silence can do a lot.

The Bottom Line

> ***"A voice is a powerful thing. Most of us have potential in our voices we haven't begun to explore. Almost anyone can expand his or her vocal qualities and capabilities."***

Depend on words

☑ *Convey visually*

Visual cues are everything people see that elicits or creates a response. Face to face, visual and vocal cues almost always have greater impact than words.

Your facial expressions should make people feel that they can come to you, that they can trust you. Smile as you arrive at work and when you greet people. Look like you enjoy working with them.

Show that you're interested. Make appropriate eye contact. Convey with your eyes what you're feeling. Inspire trust. Refrain from eye movements that send negative messages. Don't look away for long; you'll seem bored or preoccupied.

Avoid nodding if you do not agree. Don't send signals you don't intend.

Reinforce visually with gestures what you express orally. Emphasize points with gestures. But don't let your movements overwhelm your words. Avoid gestures with negative connotations. And don't point at people; it's offensive.

Don't wring your hands or fiddle with your jewelry or clothing or objects on your desk. That suggests that you're nervous or impatient.

Converse at eye level. Sit if the other person is sitting. Standing over someone can seem intimidating.

Always show that you're alert, energetic, and interested: stand upright, sit upright. You want to appear confident and at ease, but not rigid, as if tense or formal.

To emphasize a point or show greater interest in what the other person is saying, lean forward slightly, but don't get too close.

Respect the comfort zone—the space between you and the other person. This zone varies from person to person. Sense what people need or allow. Three feet is about the average.

Attire and work environment convey visual cues. What messages do they send to employees, your boss, and visitors?

Here are three suggestions for making visual cues work for you:

Neutralize negativity: Negative thinkers are easily provoked; be especially cautious about your cues. Don't show emotion. Don't react to their negative cues. Encourage dialogue. Ask questions to elicit input from the other person. Listen attentively.

Dress appropriately: If you're unsure, check out the attire worn by managers or executives two levels above you. If you aspire to reach that level, foster the perception that you're "like them." Adopt a style that suggests you're well-suited for a higher-level job.

Be congruent in your cues: A message gets mixed when the cues don't coincide. Incongruent cues diminish your credibity and may confuse people. Communicate more effectively by conveying visual cues that are consistent with your words and voice.

The Bottom Line

> *"A nod, a gesture, a raised eyebrow, a smile, or a frown—everything you do sends a signal that makes an impression on people."*

☑ *Understand differences*

*A*communication profile* consists of a *communication style* and a *thought pattern.* We each tend to favor one style and one pattern to some extent.

Communication styles range from between an *aggressive* extreme and a *passive* extreme.

Aggressive communicators typically talk loud and forcefully, usually in demanding or sarcastic tones. They intimidate those who are not aggressive and challenge those who are aggressive. If they don't like something, they fight back. They tend to monopolize conversations and rarely listen without interrupting.

Passive communicators generally speak quietly and deferentially, avoiding eye contact. They rarely convey verbal, vocal, or visual cues, so you don't know whether they're listening or lost in their own thoughts. They're reluctant to express themselves, to disagree or displease. If they don't like something, they shut down or complain.

The *passive-aggressive* style is a hybrid of the extremes. Passive-aggressive communicators act passively for a while—and then react aggressively. They're unpredictable.

Midway on the scale, the *expressive* style is well-balanced and reasonable, neither aggressive nor passive, and more moderate and stable than the passive-aggressive person. Expressive communicators speak at a moderate volume with moderate pitch, and rate and with appropriate tones. Generally, they act and react reasonably.

Thought patterns can be *concrete* or *conceptual.* Most of us tend toward one or the other; some people think well both ways.

11

The core of *concrete* thinking is logic and there is a tendency to interpret literally. Concrete thinkers process sequentially with linear logic. They analyze problems and solve them systematically. They want facts, not explanations.

At the heart of *conceptual* thinking is intuition and imagination. Conceptual thinkers process creatively. They use their gut feelings in problem solving. They look at the "big picture." They value ideas, theories, and the abstract. They like analogies, images, and metaphors.

Here are three suggestions:

Work with communication styles and thought patterns: Understand the profiles of people with whom you interact and adapt to them. You'll communicate more effectively and with fewer difficulties.

Don't react to extreme behaviors: You may feel frustrated, even angry. If so, take a break to let emotions subside—theirs and yours. Say something like, "Let's give this more thought before we continue." Do not mention emotions, or you could provoke strong reactions!

Recognize concrete and conceptual patterns: Concrete thinkers enjoy building *things*. They use terms like *think, analyze, calculate, devise, parameters,* and *practical details*. Conceptual thinkers enjoy building *relationships*. They use terms like *feel, sense, experience, insights, impressions,* and *emotions*.

The Bottom Line

"When communication is a problem, it's usually because of differing perceptions or differing communication profiles."

☐ Profile and label

☑ *Use profiling wisely*

*A*communication profile consists of a communication style and a thought pattern. The continuum of *communication styles* is defined by the extremes of *aggressive* and *passive* and the midpoint, *expressive.* The continuum of *thought patterns* is defined by the extremes of *concrete* and *conceptual* and the midpoint, *adaptive.* (People who appreciate and grasp both the conceptual and the concrete can easily adjust.) Two tendencies in communication styles multiplied by two tendencies in thought patterns equal four communication profiles. The next four sections focus on these profiles. Remember: few people fit neatly into any one profile.

As you read through each description, consider the people around you in the workplace. Try to determine the predominant profile of each.

If you're uncertain, ask. For example, "It seems I'm not stating this clearly. What do you need to hear from me?" If you ask employees for their input, they'll be impressed and hold you in higher regard. As a result, your interactions with them will improve, and they will be more productive.

Profiles have value beyond enabling us to communicate more effectively. They can help you in delegating (which employee is best suited for this task?), motivating (what's the best way to motivate this employee?), recognizing achievement (what form of recognition would most appeal to this employee?), and hiring and job placement (who would fit this job best in terms of personality?).

Here are three important points about communication profiles:

Don't label people: Each profile here is identified by a *title*. These titles are concepts intended to convey a chief characteristic of the profiles. They are *not* intended to be used to label people. You know from experience that people are not only and always one way. It depends on the situation. The profiles should help us understand people—not limit them.

Customize your communication: You'll be more effective in your interactions with others when you customize your communications to their profile and preferences. If we understand people in terms of profiles and preferences and we communicate accordingly, we can overcome many differences and work together more effectively.

Mix, don't match: When we put together a team, we're often inclined to pick people we perceive to be like us. However, choosing members who all have the same communication profile would be a mistake. The ideal team would include members from each of the four profiles. Each has strengths and weaknesses. A mix of communication styles and thought patterns ensures balance.

The Bottom Line

"The purpose of profiling is . . . to gain insights that give us a greater understanding of ourselves and others. With that understanding, we gain ideas of how to adapt our communications."

☑ *Know movers and shakers*

*T*he communication style for *movers* and *shakers* is moderately to highly expressive, and their thought patterns are adaptive to concrete.

Movers and shakers are primarily motivated to achieve goals. They focus on short-term results to achieve long-range objectives. When movers and shakers encounter setbacks and obstacles, they view them as challenges and push even harder.

They like being in charge. They tend to seek out leadership positions: executives, managers, directors, and entrepreneurs. They are decisive, especially in crises, and can give orders without hesitation.

They display "trophies"—visual evidence of accomplishments. You'll notice awards, commendations, and photographs of them in prestigious surroundings.

They think and talk in terms of "the bottom line," using expressions like "get to the point" and "cut to the chase." Their vocal tone may seem curt. They may snap their fingers, glance at their watch, or otherwise signal impatience. It's not their intention to offend; they're preoccupied with working toward their goals.

Engage mover and shaker employees in joint goal-setting. When you discuss the goals and results you expect from them, invite their input. Ask about their goals. Present the results you want as a "means to an end" for them: Show them how supporting your goals is a means to achieving theirs. Talk about *strategies*, *action plans*, *progress*, *accomplishments*, and *solutions*—action words that appeal to movers and shakers.

Show them that you're in charge. They'll relate to that and respect you. When you talk one on one, get to the point. Be decisive and assertive. Use a firm tone, but don't seem harsh or controlling.

Offer options that allow them some control. Delegate tasks that provide them with opportunities to lead, such as doing in-house training or mentoring. Make clear the limits of their authority and require that they report results to you.

Here are three more suggestions for dealing with movers and shakers:

Make them work at meetings: Don't let them feel that they're wasting time. Involve them actively. Look for agenda items for them to present. Periodically delegate leadership of meetings to them.

Be prepared: Movers and shakers are concrete thinkers who want facts. Be sure of what you're saying and talk straight; if they have doubts about you, they'll become more assertive and confrontational or tune you out. Remember this especially in performance reviews.

Remember that bosses are different: If your boss is a mover and shaker, follow these guidelines with three exceptions: Don't give the impression that you're trying to take charge. If you're usually assertive, tone it down; don't be confrontational. Show support for the boss's goals—if you're not sure, ask and then present your results in relation to those goals.

The Bottom Line

"Managing mover and shakers is comparable to taming wild horses. You don't want to break their spirit. You do want to show them who's in charge."

☐ Don't use profiles

☑ *Know narrators*

*T*he communication style for *narrators* is highly to moderately expressive, and their thought pattern is conceptual to adaptive.

Narrators are primarily motivated by a desire to tell their story and be recognized for it. They get pleasure from performing well. They'reenergized by appreciation.

Narrators are often salespeople, talking about their company, products, or services and getting recognition: commissions, bonuses, sales awards, and a pat on the back. They're also customer service reps who like dealing with people and being appreciated.

Often, narrators are self-motivated. They have posters and plaques with inspirational sayings. They keep complimentary letters and reviews. Some read self-help and motivational books.

Narrators are typically very verbal. They're inclined to elaborate and use analogies and metaphors. They're animated, with expansive gestures and body movement.

Narrators tend to be creative, coming up with ideas, taking off on "interesting detours"—tangents that may lead to other ideas. They like brainstorming, if they can occupy center stage.

They sometimes don't listen well. They're not rude or insensitive, just so eager to tell their story that they may not think about hearing yours.

To manage narrators, tell them what you expect of them and make sure they don't get offtrack and do something more fun. To help them focus, express appreciation and offer comments such as, "I like your enthusiasm on the Smith account. I'd be thrilled if you

gave even more gusto to the Jones account." Narrators will work to get words such as "so pleased," "delighted," and "Wow!"

If your communication style is highly assertive, even aggressive, fight the urge to interrupt. If the narrator talks too much or takes off on a tangent, inject something like, "I sense you're really interested in that idea (*validate*). Before we talk about it, let's finish with X (*redirect*)."

If your communication style is more passive, step it up when you're dealing with narrators. If you're not expressive, narrators will think you're not interested in them.

Following are three more suggestions to consider when you're dealing with narrators:

Show appreciation: With narrators even small gestures are big. Leave brief voice-mail messages, such as, "Good job on X." Just recognition—nothing else. Narrators love spontaneous gestures. Keep motivational note cards on hand; jot a note, and leave it where they'll find it.

Don't neglect narrators: If you do, they may perform less well to get attention from you, or they may go elsewhere. Don't say or do anything that they might perceive as a put-down.

Listen and learn: If you're a narrator, think of listening as a means of gathering information. You may pick up something interesting— stories, anecdotes, or insights.

The Bottom Line

"Narrators, when they were youngsters, loved being called on to get up in front of the class for show and tell."

☐ Don't use profiles

☑ *Know caregivers*

Caregivers have a communication style that is mildly to moderately expressive. Their thought patterns are conceptual to adaptive.

Caregivers are "people persons." Their chief motivation is to serve others. They do things that fulfill their need to be needed. They're often in jobs helping people. Caregivers like forging social bonds in the workplace through activities or just chatting.

The objects surrounding them reflect their interest in relationships—pictures of family, children, pets, and coworkers at a birthday party. They like plants. They tend to collect stuffed toys and amusing trinkets.

Caregivers are less expressive than narrators. They tend to be more reserved. They speak more softly and use fewer gestures. They often make statements that sound like questions, with their intonation rising at the end. Not wishing to offend or confront, they may not speak up unless they really care about an issue. Conflict upsets them.

Their language conveys their desire to please, with comments like, "Is that okay with you?" and, "I'm not sure it's exactly what you wanted." They may sound apologetic for no reason: "I'm sorry you didn't meet the deadline . . . ."

If you're a task-focused concrete thinker of few words, caregiver employees may challenge your communication skills.

If they socialize excessively, let them know that they're overdoing it. But avoid seeming insensitive or abrupt. Many caregivers tend to take things personally. Smile, speak kindly, and appeal to their desire

to please: "I hope I can *count on you* to . . ." or, "You'd be *doing me a big favor* if . . . ." Always appear amiable. A solemn demeanor suggests that you don't like them; a serious tone sounds like scolding.

Congratulate them on special events in their lives. Notice the newest photo on their desk. Thank them for setting up refreshments for the meeting. Occasionally compliment them.

Three more suggestions for dealing with caregivers follow:

Draw the line: They sometimes reveal more about personal matters than you need or want to know. Show interest or express empathy, but take care that your behavior can't be misinterpreted as getting involved with their personal lives.

Help them acquire critical skills: When they take on responsibilities requiring managing, they may have trouble. Provide training in assertiveness and conflict resolution. Caregivers are potentially effective managers—if they learn to assert themselves and deal with conflicts.

Fight the urge to talk: If you're a caregiver, curb your inclination to talk. Don't monopolize the conversation. Listen to others first. Don't join conversations that contain even a hint of gossip. Steer conversations back to business, if necessary.

The Bottom Line

"If you see someone wearing a happy-face button, chances are it's a caregiver."

☐ Don't use profiles

☑ *Know mapmakers*

M*apmakers* tend to use a communication style that is mildly to moderately expressive. Their thought patterns are concrete to adaptive.

Mapmakers are motivated by a need to do things right. The attributes of a good map—accuracy, precision, attention to detail—are what matter most to them. They tend to be problem solvers—especially if the problem involves a process.

They have around them their essential tools—computers, calculators, metric rulers, printouts, and spreadsheets, mechanical pencils and fine-point color pens, and likely a color-coded year-at-a-glance planning calendar.

Mapmakers are predominantly concrete thinkers and are not very expressive. They use few words. They show little interest in anything extraneous to the task at hand. They work best with facts and figures.

Their vocal and visual cues usually make it difficult to figure out what they're thinking. If you're an expressive communicator, your enthusiasm shows. Mapmakers may be enthusiastic, but they don't show it.

To manage mapmakers most effectively, try to adopt their communication style and thought pattern.

Give them time to work. Dropping last-minute surprises on them shows a lack of regard for what's important to them—doing things right.

Don't let them feel that you're rushing them, even if it's necessary that they be rushed. Apologize for the lack of time. Acknowledge that

you know they want to do the job right. Negotiate an understanding of "right" within the time limitations. In a sense give them permission to be less than perfect. Provide only the necessary information. Be straightforward and use short sentences.

Present any materials to mapmakers in writing. Support your points with facts and figures. Include charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, or spreadsheets.

When recognizing their performance, emphasize their precision, the excellence of the solution, and their meeting or exceeding the specifications.

Here are three more suggestions for dealing with mapmakers:

Minimize disagreements and delays: Managers often want results as soon as possible. Mapmakers want time to produce the best results. At the outset, clearly communicate the objective and specifications, reach agreement, negotiate a time frame, and put it in writing. At regular intervals meet to discuss progress.

Make an appointment: A mapmaker prefers to be prepared. Even if you want to meet for only 10 minutes an hour from now, set a time, specify how much time the meeting will take, and briefly state your purpose. If possible, put it in writing.

Customize communication for the right reasons: If you're serving only your own interests, then customizing your communications may be considered manipulative. However, if you're motivated by the best interests of the employee and the organization and improving relationships, then it's effective communication.

The Bottom Line

"Mapmakers are the people who design and develop the 'maps' (the end product) the rest of us use and rely on."

☑ *Connect with employees*

*T*o communicate and manage effectively, connect with your employees. To do that, build rapport, gain respect, and gear yourself to their the level of readiness.

Rapport is vital. It creates a sense of belonging. It motivates. It helps bridge differences.

Get to know each employee. Discover any common interests and similar experiences. Build on these commonalities.

Get involved in conversations with your employees. Refrain from controversy and taking sides on sensitive issues.

Touch can held build rapport. But touch only when the occasion calls for it and only briefly and appropriately. Observe the policy or norms of your organization. You can also simply gesture as though you're going to touch. It closes the physical gap but avoids the risk of offending.

Gain respect through credibility—the extent to which others believe what you tell them. For example:

- Don't make promises you can't keep. If you make a promise and later find you can't keep it, explain immediately and honestly.
- Do what you say you'll do.
- Keep employees informed.
- Announce news—good or bad—as soon as possible.
- Be honest. If you can't answer a question, admit it. Refer it to someone who can answer it or offer to find out the answer.

To communicate most effectively:

- Be sure that the outcome you want will result from the words that you use.
- Start by getting people's attention with something interesting.
- Make main points with a broad statement first and then an explanation and/or examples.
- Check understanding by inviting questions.
- Stick to the point. Don't ramble. Don't digress. Don't let anyone sidetrack you.
- Recap and wrap. Briefly restate the essence of your message.

The three recommendations here will help you to better connect with your employees:

Communicate to express, not impress: The more important the message, the more important it is to communicate it effectively. Find the clearest and most concise way to express what you have to say.

Start with your intent: To hold people's attention and interpret your communication favorably, start by stating your intent, which should be positive and constructive. If there are negative points to make, you can make them more effectively within a positive context.

Build rapport with your boss: Notice the books and publications your boss keeps around or mentions, especially those pertaining to business and management. Read the same things. Then you'll have common points to discuss while demonstrating that you're learning and developing professionally.

The Bottom Line

> *"You don't automatically get respect because you're a manager. You need to earn it."*

☐ **Talk**

☑ *Ask, look, listen*

Ask

Ask *definitive* questions for yes or no answers. Don't expect much information or any explanation. Ask *open* questions to get information or explanations. They begin with *who, what, when, where,* or *how.*

If people seem reluctant to talk, ask a well-phrased open question or two. Pause for an answer. If they don't respond, find out if they don't understand the question or if there's another problem.

Look

Visual cues can reveal a lot. Be attentive to facial expressions, gestures, and body movements.

Be sensitive to the moment and to what others are doing. If an employee is obviously preoccupied with a task or on the phone, don't start talking.

Listen

Listen attentively. Don't answer the phone, flip through files, scan your e-mail, or whatever. That sends the message, "This is more important than you." Minimize or eliminate external distractions.

Make focused and meaningful eye contact. Don't look away.

React appropriately: If you agree, nod or say, "Uh huh."

Don't interrupt. Often, people get to the most important point last. Don't finish sentences for others.

25

Focus your attention by thinking about how you'd paraphrase. Don't be formulating your response.

Paraphrase when appropriate to check your understanding: "If I understand you correctly, you're saying . . .. Is that right?"

Validate the person, even if you don't agree. After the person finishes speaking and before you respond, make a comment like, "I can understand your concern," or, "Thank you for bringing it to my attention."

These three recommendations will help you ask and listen:

Don't ask, "Why?": People sometimes take *why* questions personally, like an interrogation. Phrase the question differently. For example, instead of, "Why did you do it that way?" ask, "What were your reasons for doing it that way?" or, "How did you decide on that approach?"

Reduce interruptions: Designate an experienced employee to whom employees should take their questions first. Put an in-box on the wall *outside* your office for notes on "can-wait" matters; respond to these notes daily. Don't remain behind closed doors all day. Schedule times to be available to employees.

Schedule time for your full attention: If someone comes to talk when you can't pay full attention, do this. Ask, "What is this about?" to determine if the person will want your full attention. If so, say, "This is important to you, so I want to give you my complete attention. I can't do that right now. Let's set a time to talk about this." Schedule something immediately to meet as soon as possible.

The Bottom Line

> *"Three skills are the cornerstones of constructive communication: ask, look, listen."*

☐ Just expect good results

☑ *Give good instructions*

*G*etting the results you want from your employees starts with good instructions.

Plan

Identify *what, who, when, where, how,* and *why.* Write them out as a guide—for yourself and the employee. (If this task will be repeated, can you prepare this list as a written procedure?)

- *What.* Define the end result and specify critical criteria. Determine the priority of this task.
- *Who.* Decide which employee would be best for the task. Also, determine whom should the employee contact with questions or for assistance.
- *When.* Set the deadline for completing the task and dates for progress reports.
- *Where.* Indicate sources of information and materials.
- *Why.* Explain why the task is important.
- *How.* Describe how to proceed, step by step. The amount of detail you provide will depend on the employee.

Communicate

- Choose a time when the employee can pay full attention and there are no distractions.
- Provide an example of what you expect, if possible—a sample, model, rendering, or graphic.

- Pause for questions. As you're explaining, ask, "What questions do you have?" Don't take nodding or silence as assurance of understanding.
- Don't ask, "Do you understand?" Say, "I want to be sure I've been clear. So please restate what I've asked you to do." Your tone and expression should be pleasant, so the employee doesn't feel pressured.
- Schedule any progress reports. Say, "Let's meet this same time next week so you can update me on your progress" (positive). Don't say, "Let's meet so I can check how you're doing" (negative).

Follow Up

After the task is done, give the employee feedback and assess your instructions. Could you improve how you communicated?

Three suggestions for giving instructions follow:

Give appropriate details: Consider three factors. Has the employee ever done this or a similar task? What does the employee know already? How available will you be to answer questions while the employee is performing the task?

Never ask, "Do you have any questions?": Many employees will give the easy answer—no. Ask open-ended questions, such as, "What questions do you have?" When you convey that you expect questions, people are more likely to ask them.

Check and double-check: Sometimes employees act like they understand when they don't. Ask for questions. Set dates for progress checks. Ask the employee to post all the dates on his or her calendar while you write them in your calendar. Convey a sense of obligation by saying something like, "I trust you to complete this as we've agreed."

The Bottom Line

"When you're planning how to communicate instructions, imagine if the employee were to ask, 'So what?' How would you answer the question?"

☐ Don't say anything

☑ *Correct and praise*

*A*good manager provides feedback—corrective or positive.

It's sometimes difficult to correct inappropriate or unacceptable behavior. But it's always best to correct problem behavior. Compare the advantages of correcting the behavior and the negative consequences of doing nothing.

When you correct, focus on the behavior, not the person. Focus on actions, not attitude. Prepare by jotting down the unacceptable actions and the negative consequences.

When you give corrective feedback:

- *Do it promptly.* Don't wait for a performance review.
- *Give feedback in private. Never* correct in the presence of others.
- *Do it in person.* Don't send a memo or an e-mail.
- *Cover only one point in a session.*

Here's a brief guide:

1. Start positively, expressing your good intentions.
2. Identify the behavior to be corrected. Point out negative consequences.
3. When appropriate, ask an open question to allow the employee to explain. Be willing to listen.
4. Specify what the employee should do differently. Point out positive aspects of improving. Set a time frame for improvement.
5. Ask for a response, such as, "How do you feel about that?"
6. Convey your willingness to work with the employee on improving.

If an employee reacts negatively to corrective feedback:

■ Stay focused and stand firm.
■ Don't allow any reaction to derail the discussion or draw you into an argument.
■ Reiterate your main points.

When you notice an improvement in performance, provide positive feedback.

With all employees, look for occasions to express appreciation. Do it promptly, specifically, and sincerely. However, don't praise an employee in the presence of others unless you know he or she is comfortable with it.

Appreciation is motivating and helps build confidence, so employees will want to do their best for you.

When you're providing feedback, wording means a lot. Here are three suggestions for good phrasing:

Don't start with "you": Statements beginning with "you" give the impression that you're making the person the problem. Begin by stating, "I've noticed that . . .," or, "I'm concerned when . . . ."

Don't label behavior as unacceptable or inappropriate: Put those words in some context. Phrase the point, "According to company policy, it's inappropriate for an employee to . . . ."

Never say "never" or "always": These words generalize absolutely and negatively—someone who *always* or *never* does something is unlikely to change. Instead of "always," try "often," or "frequently." Instead of "never," try "rarely" or "infrequently."

The Bottom Line

> ***"A common refrain in management training is, 'Praise in public. Correct in private.' The latter recommendation is solid, but the former recommendation may be problematic."***

☐ Forge onward

☑ *Deal with disturbances*

*C*ounterproductive communications inhibit work and strain relationships. Three common disturbances are *tangents*, *crying*, and *complaints* about coworkers.

End tangents immediately by saying, "The issue is not _____. The issue is _____." Remain firm. Repeat as often as is necessary. If an employee becomes upset and uses inappropriate language, focus on the issue. Correct the behavior later.

People cry. Sometimes it's natural emotions. Sometimes it's intentional—to manipulate. Whatever the reason, here's how to deal with crying:

- Acknowledge the feelings.
- Suggest a break. Specify a short time, such as 3 minutes and 40 seconds. That odd specificity may lighten the mood.
- Resume exactly on time.
- If the crying starts again, suggest another break. Make it shorter, but still an odd time length.
- If the crying starts again, offer two options: Continue or resume early the next day.

Keep a box of tissues nearby.

Employees may complain to you about coworkers. Try this technique to stop passive communicators and chronic complainers.

Ask, "Have you talked with X about this?" Usually the answer is no.

Ask, "May I call X in so we can clear this up right now?" Usually the answer will be no.

31

Ask, "May I talk with X and tell her you've met with me and what you've told me?" Usually the answer will be no. Chronic complainers want sympathy, not solutions. Passive communicators want you to solve their problem. Don't take responsibility. If the employee answers, "Talk with X but don't say I told you," reply, "I'm not willing to do that because this is between you and X. If you want to involve me, I'll discuss it with both of you, together."

Concluding, "When you're ready to resolve this, let me know." Use "when," not "if," to convey that you expect the employee to solve the problem.

Here are three more suggestions for dealing with counterproductive communication:

Use signals—quick and simple. Meet with employees to identify counterproductive communication. Use signals to to get your message across—gestures or props or even a single word. For example, hold up a sign reading, "Solutions First" or point upward with an index finger (solutions come first). Or forget signals and say simply, "Solutions."

Be sensitive to moods: Never appear to take lightly what someone takes seriously. What's important to employees should be important to you. Don't risk offending. Humor may be hazardous when someone is upset or communicating aggressively.

Be attentive to issues of potential liability: These would include bias, harassment, health or safety hazards, or threats. Minimize the potential legal action by promoting open communication. Resolve any concerns immediately. Address interpersonal conflicts early on.

The Bottom Line

"Emotional reactions are not unusual in conflicts among coworkers. It falls to you to be a source of calm. By your facial expression, tone of voice, and demeanor convey composure."

☐ Let people be as they are

☑ *Manage aggression*

*T*o manage aggressive communicators:

- *Understand what motivates the behavior*—typically needs to control, to be right, and to win.
- *Allow venting initially.* Don't argue or interrupt. Let the intensity subside a little.
- *Don't tell them how to think, feel,* or *be.* No, "Calm down," or, "You shouldn't feel that way," or, "Don't be unreasonable." *Don't seem judgmental.*
- *Stay calm.* Emotionally detach yourself from the intensity. Respond in short sentences, in an even tone, at a normal rate of speech, and with no facial expression.
- *Acknowledge the situation.* "I can see how that would be frustrating," or, "It's unfortunate that this happened." Express empathy—but not agreement. Be succinct: "Tell me more," or, "Go on."
- *Don't use trite wisdom*—that is, anything that seems condescending.
- *Focus on the core concern.* What's really bothering the person?
- *Ask "what" and "how" questions.* "What do *you* think we should do?" "How do *you* suggest we handle this?" Wait for answers. Silence can be calming.
- *Don't offer advice, unless asked you're asked for it.*
- *Set limits.* If the person behaves unacceptably—verbal abuse, profanity, or excessive actions—assert that you will not tolerate it. "If you want me to hear you out, then I'm asking you to *not* _____. I

33

find it offensive, and I won't tolerate it. Now, what were you saying about _____?" Convey that the person has a choice.

- *Be assertive*—moderate, yet firm.

When people react explosively only *occasionally,* here's how to handle their outbursts:

- *Affirm the person.* Boost his or her self-esteem and confidence.
- *Call a break to allow time for emotions to subside.* Use your words carefully: Don't mention emotions. Say, "Let's break for a few minutes to give this idea more thought."
- *Identify the trigger:* Most explosions can be prevented by people refraining from caustic, critical, or sarcastic remarks.

Here are three more suggestions:

Stop the sniping: Some people use sarcasm as a weapon. Stop it immediately. When someone snipes, look at him or her directly, pause for a moment, restate the remark but without the sarcasm, and ask what he or she meant.

Show that you're trying to understand: When an aggressive communicator is talking, show interest. Convey, "You've got my attention. I'm trying to understand." It allows them to feel in control—and it keeps you from having to talk.

Monitor the aggressiveness: If it continues or escalates, consider anger management training or an employee assistance program. Don't take any threats (implied or explicit) lightly or counter with threats. Handle them according to your organization's policies.

The Bottom Line

> *"If aggressive communicators inhabit the world where you work, handle with care."*

☑ *Help passive communicators*

You and your employees are discussing improving a process. They're offering suggestions—except the employee likely to be affected the most. After every suggestion, you ask this person for opinions, thoughts, feelings. The person only smiles and says nothing or, "Fine," or, "okay," revealing nothing.

Passive communicators don't want to disappoint or upset anybody. They tend to say little. If they speak up, generally they do so meekly—and they'll back down if someone questions them or disagrees. They need reassurance, approval, and harmony in relationships. Try these suggestions to help them:

- *Don't come on strong.* If you usually communicate confidently and assertively, tone it down. If you usually communicate aggressively, fight that inclination.
- *Be congenial and patient.* Speak in a mild tone. Smile if appropriate to the situation. Project a sense of being at ease.
- *Connect with empathy.* Express interest in understanding their concerns. For example, "If I were in your shoes, I might feel a bit confused. Is that how you're feeling?"
- *Reassure.* Use phrases like, "You can be sure . . .," and, "I'm confident . . . ."
- *Encourage:* Say things like, "I welcome any questions you have," "I value your ideas, and I want to hear them," "I hope you know you can speak openly here."
- *Ask open questions.* Then look like you expect answers. Lean forward slightly. If necessary, rephrase. For example, "Which idea

do you like most?" might be restated as "Which idea would be most workable?"

- *Convey accountability.* Finally, say something like, "If you don't let me know, you leave me no recourse but to . . . . " Allow a moment. Then continue, "If you don't speak up, I'll expect you to accept whatever happens as a result of my decision."

Three more recommendations follow:

Reduce pressure: To deal with "I don't know," training professional Michael Staver suggests asking, "If you did know, what would your answer be?" Because it's unexpected and somewhat humorous, this question helps put passive communicators at ease. If the person still hesitates or insists, "I said I don't know," further reduce the pressure and appeal to the desire to please—"Help me out here. What's your best guess?"

Don't appear critical: Passive communicators want to be liked and to please. They often feel hurt if someone seems to be blaming them or finding fault.

Don't be abrupt or rush them: Typically, passive communicators take more time than other kinds of communicators because they want their ideas or answers to be "good" or "right." Don't give the impression that the person is holding you up.

The Bottom Line

> *"Passive communicators don't want to make waves, rock the boat, ruffle anyone's feathers."*

☐ Ignore conflicts

☑ *Help resolve conflicts*

Conflict is natural when there are differences in attitudes, percep-
tions, expectations, interpretations, opinions, and communication
profiles and preferences. But it can become personal, generate stress
and negativity, cause issues to be suppressed, breed hostilities, and
waste time, energy, potential, and money.

There are three roles you might play when you're dealing with
counterproductive conflicts.

- *Participant.* Do *not* step into this role. Avoid becoming embroiled
  in the conflict.
- *Arbitrator.* Avoid this role. An arbitrator listens to each party's per-
  spective and decides how to settle the dispute. Unfortunately,
  employees generally do not embrace an arbitrated decision.
  Some may accuse you of favoritism. Some may resent you. So you
  end up with employee-manager conflicts.
- *Facilitator.* Assume this role. A facilitator helps employees resolve
  their conflict themselves. Here's how to facilitate:
  - Help the parties establish ground rules for their discussions.
  - Help them define the core issue by asking open questions that
    will elicit their perspectives and help them state their posi-
    tions.
  - Encourage them to consider options, by asking, "What if?"
    questions.
  - Listen attentively. Restate points when necessary to avoid con-
    fusion or misunderstanding.

37

- Help them identify common interests, such as mutual goals.
- Recap the key points of each discussion.
- Confirm the agreement the employees reach.
- Help them plan and schedule their solution.
- Ask them to set a date for giving you a progress report.

When the conflict is resolved, commend the parties on their success. And be sure to follow up.

Here are three more suggestions that should help you manage conflict:

Don't intervene without an invitation: When you become aware of a conflict between employees, watch to see if they're resolving it themselves. If they're not, offer assistance—"I know it's important to you to settle this matter. May I help out?" or, "I'm concerned that this is getting out of hand. Would you be willing to let me work with you on it?" Don't jump in and take over.

Prevent polarization: The key to resolving conflicts is to keep the parties from becoming polarized around their positions. Help them find interests they have in common and focus on those interests. When people keep in mind their common interests, they will discuss other issues more reasonably and are more likely to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

Be a model for your employees: As you facilitate problem-solving discussions, demonstrate conflict-resolution skills that employees can use if other conflicts arise. They can learn that conflict is *constructive* when it brings out valid concerns, generates creative thinking, and results in improvements.

The Bottom Line

> ***"The most frequently cited source of interpersonal conflict in an organization is poor communication."***

☐ Just gather them all

☑ *Prepare for meetings*

*M*eet well and wisely.

Know what it costs to meet. Keep in mind the average hourly cost per person and the cost (time and money) of providing materials and/or refreshments. Weigh those costs against the benefits you anticipate from the meeting. Do the benefits justify the costs? Is there a better way to achieve those benefits?

If you decide to hold a meeting, keep those calculations close and use them as an incentive to plan effectively, invite only the necessary people and conduct the meeting most efficiently:

Specify the purpose of the meeting in terms of the results you want.

Outline the agenda. Determine items appropriate to the purpose— and the time scheduled. Put the highest-priority item first. Put last an item that's exciting, humorous, energizing, or motivating.

Detail the agenda. For each item, allot the time, indicate the activity (presentation, discussion, etc.), and name the person responsible. Allot sufficient time for each item, so you neither rush nor bore. Tell each person responsible for an item what you expect.

Distribute the agenda in advance, at least two or three days. Attach any materials participants will need in their preparing for the meeting.

Determine who should attend the meeting based on the purpose, the agenda, and the cost. If there are several items and only one of them concerns all participants, put that item first. After dealing with that item, excuse those who have no reason to stay.

In planning, assign meeting roles:

39

The *leader* opens the meeting, states the purpose, introduces the agenda, keeps the meeting on track, and closes the meeting.

The *facilitator* guides the participants in any activities.

The *timekeeper* keeps track of the time spent on each item and signals the time remaining and then the time to stop.

The *recorder* records the minutes (formal) or takes notes of key discussion points, tasks assigned, and decisions reached (informal).

Consider these three recommendations:

Kick the habit: If you're meeting because "there's always a staff meeting every week," stop it. That's only a reason, not a purpose. If you don't have a purpose, don't meet.

Communicate when you delegate: Are you delegating arrangements—room, handouts, equipment, and refreshments? If so, communicate the purpose of the meeting, the agenda, and the setting you want—lighting, room temperature, seating, and choice of refreshments.

Delegate and rotate: Whenever possible, delegate meeting roles as a way to develop employees, involve employees more actively, and share the responsibilities. Rotate the roles among your employees.

The Bottom Line

> *"Managers often overlook the potential of meetings. Meetings are a way to do many of the things you need to do to be effective."*

✓ *Run meetings right*

*C*onduct meetings as planned—efficiently and effectively.

Start on time, even if few or none of the participants has arrived. This demonstrates that meetings are important.

Running a meeting right means ensuring that participants articulate their points, stay focused on the subject, interact with respect, and achieve the purpose:

- *Be alert to signals* sent by facial expressions and body language. Help participants articulate their reactions.
- *Remain objective.* Don't let your ideas and opinions influence how you react to other ideas and opinions.
- *Promote balanced participation.* Rein in those who are dominating and draw out those who are not contributing enough. Encourage open communication. Be positive toward those who contribute.
- *Restate contributions.* If participants are difficult to understand, interrupt tactfully and restate the point clearly and succinctly or wait and then sum up the comments and confirm, "Is that correct?"
- *Capture key points.* Don't let points get lost. You may need to return to a point and restate it. If necessary, probe to bring out more. Ask the recorder to write down important contributions and display them for all to see—on a board, a flip chart, sheets on the walls, or an electronic display.
- *Mediate differences of opinion.* Keep discussions from deteriorating into divisive conflicts. When differences of opinion arise, guide

the participants toward resolution. Keep them focused on their common interests and objectives.

At the end of a meeting, briefly address the following three questions:

- *What key points did we cover?* Reiterate the points yourself or ask the participants to do so.
- *What tasks were assigned?* Review each task: person responsible, date due, and method of reporting results to participants.
- *What did we accomplish?* Echo the purpose of the meeting and thank the participants.

Here are three more suggestions:

Exhibit model behavior: Hold yourself to the expectations you have for others. If you expect *them* to be on time, *you* must be on time. If you want *them* to show respect, *you* must show respect.

Don't enable: Employees who miss meetings or arrive late may ask you what they missed. Don't make it easy for them to be lax. Suggest that they check with a coworker. Convey the message of accountability. After a while, employees will learn to be there on time.

Use ground rules: Ask for a few volunteers to develop rules for your group meetings, such as, "Arrive on time," "Prepare," "Stick to the agenda," "Don't interrupt," and "Show respect." Have the group discuss, modify, and adopt the rules. Then, for every meeting, post the rules and enforce them.

The Bottom Line

"Managers often overlook the potential of meetings. Meetings are an opportunity to do many of the things you need to do to be effective."

☐ Be free and improvise

☑ *Prepare to present*

*P*repare for any presentation you make, whenever possible.

Focus on the audience. Memorize: "It's not about me. It's about *them.*" Start from *their* perspective. Make it matter to *them.*

Establish your objective. What do you want them to do because of your presentation? Everything you do should move your audience toward that objective.

Decide what to present and how. What do they know about this subject? What should you provide so you can achieve your objective? What are their interests and concerns? What will connect with them? What will motivate them? Two other factors are crucial: time frame and setting.

Pick your primary points—what you most want people to remember. Three is optimal.

Select supporting material for each point. What can help you make your points—examples, analogies, comparisons, stories, quotations, facts, models, graphics? Use enough to make each point—that's all. It should be right for the audience, promote your objective, and fit your time limit.

Create transitions between primary points. In one sentence, restate the point you're finishing and introduce the point you're beginning.

Craft your recap and close. Summarize your primary points. Then close strong and positively toward your objective.

Compose your opening and preview. Open with something to get attention—a quote, statistics, rhetorical questions, a story, a visual

aid. Never a joke. From that opening, transition into your presentation with a preview—a brief statement of your primary points.

Organize the pieces.

- Open and preview
- Point 1 and material
- Transition
- Point 2 and material
- Transition
- Point 3 and material
- Recap and close

Does it progress smoothly and logically—from the perspective of the audience? Does it make sense? Does it interest? Does each part move toward the objective?

Create support materials. Help make your points with visual aids and handouts.

Three final recommendations:

Write out your objective: Then keep it close as you develop your presentation. Here's a basic format: *When I've finished this presentation on _____, _____ (e.g., employees, boss, other managers) will _____.* The more specific and succinct, the better.

Make your primary points more memorable: Word them to form an acronym, alliteration, repetition of a key term, or open questions.

Don't end with Q&A: If you set aside time for questions, invite them after the recap but before the close. Keep control of the close so you can wrap up your presentation as you prefer.

The Bottom Line

"A presentation gives you the greatest chance to make a powerful impact. ... Given what you stand to gain from a good presentation, it pays to be very well prepared."

☐ Keep it fresh

☑ *Practice and present*

*P*ractice your presentation.

Time yourself. Pay attention to your pace. If the presentation is very important, rehearse it in front of a few people and solicit their opinions.

Here are some recommendations for presenting:

- *Capture and keep attention.* Start strong. Move quickly into the heart of your presentation. Vary your timing and tempo to sustain interest. Provide a change of activity. every few minutes.
- *Present with energy and expressive cues.* Your cues should communicate appropriately and move people toward your objective.
- *Verbal cues.* Use words that communicate accurately. Use short sentences. Pause periodically to let people process what you're saying. Avoid jargon or words that might impede understanding. Don't risk offending anyone, even in an attempt at humor. Don't say anything that might distract.
- *Vocal cue.* Speak up and speak clearly. Vary the pitch, rate, volume, and tone. Speak naturally, as though you're conversing with people in the audience.
- *Visual cue.* Communicate through facial expressions, gestures, and movement. Move around. Make and maintain eye contact with the audience. If you must refer to notes, know your material well enough that you need to glance at them only from time to time. Be attentive to visual cues from the audience and adjust accordingly.

- *Be prepared for questions.* Welcome them as cues that people are paying attention. And most questions signal an interest in the subject.

When you're preparing your presentation, anticipate questions and prepare answers. You can incorporate a question in your presentation—for example, "You probably want to know how this change will affect you"—and then answer it or you can be ready for the question to come up.

Here are three suggestions for dealing with nervousness:

Hide your anxiety: It can show in various ways—quaking voice, shrill pitch, rapid rate of speech, wooden posture, poor eye contact. Work to control these cues. Insert reminders throughout your notes to slow down, make eye contact, use gestures, and so forth.

Know your opening: Practice what you're going to say and how you're going to say it. From the outset, you'll impress people as being confident and interested in them. Also, any butterflies in your stomach are likely to flutter less if you start strong.

Answer questions the right way: Focus on the person asking the question. If necessary for yourself or others, paraphrase it. Acknowledge the person; affirmations like, "You've raised an interesting point," signal that you're receptive to questions. Answer the question, addressing the group. Never get defensive or debate. Treat every question as important.

The Bottom Line

"Think of presenting as a competitive sport. You're competing for attention. Just because people attend a presentation doesn't mean they're attentive. You must capture and keep their interest."

✔ *E-mail more effectively*

*M*ake e-mail more effective:

- *Limit each e-mail to one subject.* A single-subject e-mail is easier to read and more likely to get results than an e-mail about a variety of things.
- *Use informal salutations and closings.* Start with the recipient's name and end with something like, "Regards," or, "Thanks."
- *Start with what's most important.* Then provide details.
- *Be brief.*
- *Think "public."* Never put in an e-mail what you wouldn't put in a letter that would end up in company files. Never e-mail material that's inappropriate in the workplace.
- *Make it easy to read.* Use a conversational style. Keep paragraphs short. Put a line of space between paragraphs. Use bullets to mark key points. Use mixed case, not all caps or all lowercase. Use **bold**, *italic*, and <u>underlining</u> sparingly, if at all. Use a font large enough and clear enough to be read easily.
- *Provide contact information*—telephone number, fax number, and address. E-mail programs can automatically add a *signature containing contact information* to each outgoing message.
- *Read it—aloud.* Have you communicated effectively enough to get the reaction you want?
- *Proofread.* If you must read a sentence twice to understand it, revise it.

- *Check your e-mail regularly*—but don't assume that your recipients will be as responsible. Deal with e-mail as soon as possible. If you cannot act immediately, at least acknowledge receipt.
- *Keep the subject line* when replying; don't change it. And then stick to that subject. If you have something to say on another subject, put it in a separate e-mail.
- *Enforce an e-mail policy.* It should address at least these concerns:
  - Confidentiality of company information
  - Use of copyrighted material
  - Biased, defamatory, obscene, or harassing content

For guidance, search the Web for "e-mail policies"; you'll find hundreds.

Here are three suggestions for using e-mail effectively:

Address judiciously: If you are e-mailing more than one person, choose the most appropriate line. Recipients in the "To" or "Cc" lines will know that the others are receiving the e-mail. Recipients in the "Bcc" line will be hidden from recipients in the "To" and "Cc" lines. Verify what you want to send to each of the recipients you've listed.

Inform and interest people with your subject: The subjectline should convey the focus of the message and capture the attention of the recipient(s).

E-mail in haste, repent at leisure. E-mail is quick and easy—and dangerous if strong emotions push you into dashing off an e-mail. Read your message carefully several times. Is that really what you want to communicate?

The Bottom Line

"Whenever new technology is introduced into society, there must be a counterbalancing human response—that is, high touch—*or the technology is rejected."*

—John Naisbitt, Megatrends *(1982)*

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"To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others."

—*Anthony Robbins,* Unlimited Power: The New Science of Personal Achievement *(1986)*

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