

Career Rx

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Communication Effectiveness

Knowing your message, communicating effectively and ensuring the meaning is understood by your audience is critical for success. When you meet someone face to face, your message is communicated by both, verbal and non verbal symbols. Non verbal communication is very powerful. Remember how when you were growing up, how your parent could always see past what you were telling them. Non verbal symbols can change the meaning of what is said to the listener. How this message is received depends on the listener's experiences.

There are two ways to communicate, through "shared meaning" or "ambiguity". Shared meaning occurs when two people share agreement in their interpretation of an experience or event (M. Young and J. E. Post). Ambiguity is when the communicator's intent and the receiver's interpretation do not correspond (E. M. Eisenberg). Think about when you are receiving feedback during a performance review. You and your manager both experienced the work but your personal experiences and feedback influences how the process and results were received. There are times when we want to communicate clearly through shared meanings and at other times, through ambiguous messages, leaving the interpretation to the listener. When you are listening to a speaker or professor, they likely will use both modes of communication. There is value to both styles and understanding your audience.

Let's review some techniques we use when we are in situations that make us uncomfortable. These techniques are our defense in covering our true feelings to keep our non-verbal communications from slipping out. Non verbal cues are often involuntary reactions. These can cause what you say to be interpreted as sarcastic, insincere or coerced.

Criticism is an example of a situation where it is difficult to receive information without acting defensive, scared or hurt. Having to deliver criticism can also create the same kind of reaction in the deliverer of criticism. People are particularly sensitive to not only what you say but how you say it.

There are several techniques that we use when we want to keep non-verbal communication from slipping out. One technique is to use a poker face. In order to avoid giving off a cue as to how we really feel, we act like a robot. This approach may not communicate a specific non-verbal message, but it will communicate that something is wrong. Sarcasm is another approach. With sarcasm, we use irony to confuse the listener making our message ambiguous. Humor is also used to mask our reaction to a comment or uncomfortable situation. Acting confused can communicate disagreement or denial.

We have to be able to receive the feedback in order not to trigger one of our defense mechanisms. People are particularly sensitive to not only what you say, but how you communicate it verbally and by your non verbal behaviors.

"Who you are is speaking so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying"

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The most effective communication approach for these situations is honesty. While it may be difficult to receive or give information that is emotionally charged, it is generally better dealt with in a genuinely constructive manner. This approach requires the development of two character traits that are not easy to achieve. The first is self confidence. We do not have to be the best person in the world, but you have to be accepting of who you are and not obsessed about who you are supposed to be. The second character trait is to have a general desire to become better. Genuine congruence with these traits makes it possible to handle difficult emotional challenges without flinching or running for cover. With a proper orientation, a performance review or an interview becomes a welcome opportunity for growth. The desire to sit and take it or fight back can be transformed into an important opportunity to communicate and learn.

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Lisa's extensive human resources and coaching experience with Fortune 500 companies, small enterprises, medium-sized firms, and non-profit organizations gives her the unique ability to bring together wide-ranging perspectives on career transitions, executive and leadership development. She has consulted with a wide variety of sectors — consumer goods, financial services, healthcare, media and entertainment, pharmaceutical and life sciences, publishing, professional services, technology, and non-profit. Lisa has a passion for motivational speaking, conducts career forums, and provides executive and career coaching.

Lisa's greatest strength is that she enables individuals and organizations to see themselves in new ways, freeing them to achieve their goals. Lisa can be reached at Lisa@ChenofskySinger.com.