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# Manager Development Program eLesson

## Effective Communicator's Adaptability

Now we are getting into one of the skills that separate the good managers from the mediocre. Managers who are effective are adaptable as communicators. They assume that everyone and every situation are different and it is their responsibility to adjust how and when they communicate to best fit their listeners and the matters about which they are communicating. Effective communicators pay attention to the following five issues as they relate to communicating:

### **HOW you should communicate**

Put your communications in forms that work best for the recipients:

- Email - Voicemail - Brief summaries
- Dialogue and interaction about the subjects

### **WHAT you should communicate**

Communicate those things that the person needs and cares about:

- Bring solutions more often than you bring problems
- Include the person in your finding solutions
- Ask for the person's views before telling yours
- Be direct - Indirect
- Does the person need the information
- Bring it up before it becomes a bigger problem

### **WHEN you should communicate**

Identify the best times to communicate with your direct reports:

- Set up appointments
- Anytime
- One-on-one or in team meetings
- Only when they ask
- Mornings - Late afternoon - Fridays - Before a particular meeting

### **HOW FREQUENTLY you should communicate**

Identify how frequently your direct reports need to hear from you to feel informed:

- Daily
- Very frequently on important projects
- Only when there is a problem
- Every Monday

### **WHAT PREPARATION is needed to gain receptivity**

Assess the present state of your relationship with your direct report:

- Will it require significant preparation
- Short and sweet will work fine
- Someone else needs to be there, too
- This will take multiple conversations

Effective communicators do not focus on how they think they should be able to communicate with others - they focus on the ways, times, and methods that best get the message to the receiver. They focus on being effective and not on "shoulds" or expectations they have for others.

## Communicating Effectively as a Manager

### **Up, Sideways, and Down in the Organization**

Communication is often identified as the number one problem in businesses. Communication is the title for a group of behaviors (the things you do and the things you say on a regular basis) that are

important when working with people. This section distinguishes the key aspects of communicating with the three different groups who most affect your success.

Moving from an individual performer to a manager also changes the breadth of influence and interaction. Prior to being in management you had to do your job, get along with your peers, and respond to your immediate supervisor. Your communication requirements were either focused upward; keeping your boss informed, or sideways; communicating with your peers who were also focused on their respective jobs. As a manager, you have to be continually responsive to three groups of people. You have a boss and senior management to whom you have to respond. You have groups of peers, who are also managing, with whom you must cooperate and enlist support. And you have your direct reports who you manage and oversee.

All three of these groups of people are influential to your success. If you do not keep the members of any of these three groups appropriately informed, you will either falter or fail. If you do not continually keep your boss and direct reports informed, they will not do what you need and you will fail. If you do not communicate effectively with your peers, you will be very vulnerable to being mistreated, sabotaged, or unfairly judged.

### **Different Tools Under Varying Conditions**

Email is a great way to deliver data. It is a poor way to communicate personal information, and it is often ineffective as a tool to get support, responses, or to address conflicts. On the other hand, some people can only "hear" things that they read.

Voice messages are a better way to deliver information that requires or is likely to elicit a response. But keep in mind that some people do not "hear" with their ears, they have to "see it" or "feel it" in order to hear it.

Personal contact and dialogue (phone, face-to-face, or handwritten notes) are the best ways to communicate personal messages and to get the full attention of another person.

...just because you sent me an email or left a voice mail, does not mean you have communicated with me! As a matter of fact, Clear Direction's poll found that fewer than 50% of all executives read emails that are longer than half of a page!

### **Your Thinking as a Communicator**

The following are strengths that you have that can help you be an effective communicator:

Your focus on practical thinking gives you a significant source of strength as a communicator. First, it gives you a perspective that things in the world change and the adaptability is key to being effective. Secondly, it enables you to be attentive to what others are looking for in their work colleagues: confidence in your ability to get the job done, responsiveness, and effectiveness. Thirdly, it gives you an awareness of what motivates others to action. All these combine to make you effective in your ability to dialogue, persuade and interact with others.

This type of communicating includes:

1. Keeping your direct reports informed of details that pertain to work and would lead them to feel that they are competent and making good progress
2. Talking through things with others so that they can be more involved in creating the outcomes
3. Initiating conversations where they can give advice and suggestions
4. Giving advice when they get stuck or off track

Your attention to order and structure can be a significant strength when communicating. It can enable you to put your ideas into a framework that makes sense to others, it can direct you to have things be understandable to others, and it can direct you to see how things fit together to make the whole. This orientation focuses on facts, standards, information, and principles, therefore your communication will tend to deal with these aspects. Be sure to use your attention to things being logical and clearly understood to excel in your communication with others. While these are not able to stand on their own, these are essential for effective communication.

### **Watch Out For**

The following are thinking orientations that can inhibit your being an effective communicator:

Your attention to practical results and making good use of your time can be an impediment to being an effective communicator. While this orientation gives you a good ability to dialogue, it also can cause you to be impatient, not want to spend time or energy listening to others or thinking things through

thoroughly. You will be more inclined to give advice than to be understanding or pay attention to feelings that are affecting your direct reports. Practice engaging others in your conversations, listening to what is important to them, waiting for them to reach conclusions and figure things out that are obvious to you, and letting silence work in your conversations when it is most appropriate.

Also, be aware that often practical thinking causes an individual to be more attentive to keeping the options open and not pinning things down in absolute ways. This can be very frustrating to most people who need to be able to count on things in the future and not have those things be conditional or subject to change.

Communicating with a person who has expectations of how things should be, who is logical in his approach, and who needs things to make sense can be very difficult and exhausting. You will have a tendency to appeal to things needing to be logical or make sense. When you reach a conclusion it will be after you have thought about your perspective in such a way that it makes sense to you. When others disagree or have differing views, you will tend to appeal to your reasoning as counter-evidence or the basis for your disagreement. You will also have an idea of how things are before hearing the perspectives or input of others. This means that when you are told something that does not jive with how you think, you will be resistant to that input. Be aware that this can be exhausting to others. You can become so "reasonable" and "resistant" that no one will want to disagree with you - it will be too tiring, too painful, or just not worth it. Watch how others respond or react to you. And be aware that it may be a sign that your communicating style is offensive if others do not disagree with you.

You will also have a tendency to set expectations of how others should act. Most people believe that people should read their email messages and listen to their voicemail. They also believe that people should be attentive to problems when others bring them up. But humans do not read all of their email messages, do not listen to all of their voicemail messages, and do not always have the energy to be able to hear news at all times of the day or week. Be deliberate in learning how to be an effective communicator with others - focus on the results you want to secure from your communications and use the methods that work with each different person to get those results. Become adaptable to the different people you interact with.

## **Suggestions**

Keep a detailed record of what communications work most effectively with your boss, peers, subordinates, and loved ones. Get to the point that you know the best ways, times, and frequencies to communicate with each of these people. Master becoming effective with the different people with whom you work and live.

The most effective communicators master understanding and disarming the different ways that people disagree. They realize that some people disagree verbally while others disagree with silence. Sensitize yourself to listen for and be able to recognize all kinds of disagreement: silence, verbal "Yes" with non-verbal "No," excuses, changing the subject, and defensiveness. Then practice disarming those disagreements with clear, non-defensive responses where you re-address the issue at hand without judging or attacking the other person.

Remember that in most cases silence is not golden and actions speak louder than words. People do better when they feel like they are included. Keeping others informed is one of the best ways to honor them and make them feel included. On the other hand, it's the little things that you do and do not do on a daily basis that lead people to believe that you respect them and value what they do. Develop a reputation by your performance, consistent communicating, and by your actions, of being a person who keeps people informed and who is appreciative of others contributions.

Remember, the key ingredient to being a great communicator comes from focusing your attention on what others need and focusing away from what is easiest for you.

Thank you,  
Clear Direction Inc.