

Effective Communications
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Effective communication is important in our everyday lives, and it's particularly important in the workplace. While that's a nice warm fuzzy statement that should be on a plaque hanging on a wall someplace, let's look at why effective communication really is important to each of us. Remember the key word is "Effective". That means we're talking about results and not just the effort.

We'll start with a rather self-centered approach to the importance of communication by asking - What's in it for me? Some (but not all) of the answers to that question are:

- To be understood
- To gain acceptance and endorsement of my ideas
- To get something done
- To be more effective and efficient in my job
- To understand someone else

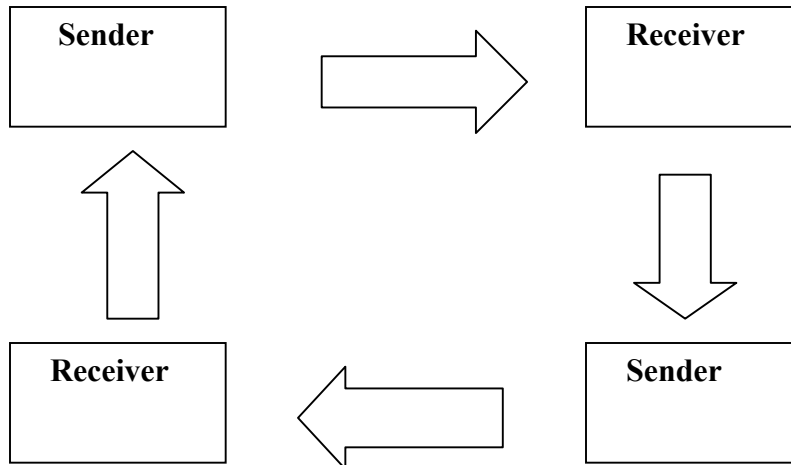
Does your job get easier and are you better off if just the five things mentioned above happen to you? I would think the answer to both parts of the question would be yes and yes. Oh by the way, guess what the people you interact with in this process want? They want the exact same thing you do. So let's process a big checkmark for importance of effective communications to you and others.

Time for a pop quiz on communications (stop hyper-ventilating this is not being turned in for a grade). Read the following nine questions and answer True or False for each.

1. We always know what the other person means.
2. Others always know what we mean.
3. The more words you say about a subject, the more likely you are to properly communicate your ideas.
4. To communicate well all you need are the right words.
5. Effective communication is easy.
6. If no one asks questions it means they understand.
7. I'm the only person I have to worry about.
8. I can't affect how well the other person understands me.
9. I can't influence others in the organization.

Ok, pencils down. What were your answers to each of the questions? If you answered False to each question, go to the head of the class. The answer to each question is indeed False.

There is a very simple model to understand the communication process. People are either senders or receivers of information. A person (Sender) sends information to another person (Receiver). That person now responds to the first person and the roles are switched. The process continues until one party does not respond to the other.



Remember effective communication is a two-way street with both the Sender and the Receiver sharing responsibility to make it work.

There can be times when different things interfere with the communication process. Just like interference distorts radio signals, there are things that interfere with the communication process and distort the messages being sent and how it is received. Some of the things that can cause interference are:

- Interruptions of the process
- Interpretation of information
- Emotions
- Lack of attention or commitment to the conversation
- No purpose or focus to the communication
- The surroundings and environment where the communication takes place
- Too many different messages at once
- Mixed message – verbal and non-verbal

So let's go back to our pop quiz.

Questions 1 & 2 - We don't always know what the other person means, and likewise they don't always know what we mean. If you're not sure ask

questions to clarify. Read the body language, you can tell when someone isn't getting the message.

Questions 3 & 4 – Different words have different meanings to different people. Just because you know what your words mean doesn't ensure the person hearing the words uses the same meaning. You don't have to have an expanded vocabulary to communicate. In fact research has shown that effective communication is 55% Body Language and Gestures, 38% Voice Tone and Inflection, and 7% Spoken Word (yes it does add up to 100%).

Question 5 – Effective communication is not easy. It takes work at every step of the process each time that process occurs.

Question 6 – Just because someone doesn't ask a question don't assume they understand. They may understand based on their meaning to your words, but not yours. They may be confused and not know what question to ask. It's ok to ask someone if they understand, or ask them to tell you what they thought you said, or ask them what they understand should happen as a result of the conversation.

Questions 7, 8, and 9 – As discussed, communication is a two way street. We're reaching out to someone for a reason. If the other person doesn't respond or act as we'd like or need, then the process breaks down. When that happens we all fail.

Effective communications is a process with a number of interconnected pieces, and all those pieces must work together at all times or the process breaks down. It doesn't just happen, good communication requires a commitment from those involved. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone is accountable for the results.