COMMUNICATION

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Communication is the ability to effectively, accurately, and succinctly convey a point through written or oral medium in a global environment.

Effective communication is characterized as the use of the correct medium and style to share information.

Effective communication may also require visual aids. Accurate communication contains proper grammar, clear dialogue, and is achieved through proofreading and rewriting. Succinct communication is important in a fast paced environment where ideas must be quickly exchanged (Quinn, 2014). Succinct communication may require lists and formatting to draw attention to important points. Communication occurs consistently, and it is important to know the various aspects of this skill, starting with value in the workplace.

VALUE IN THE WORKPLACE

Communication skills have value throughout the student's career path. A survey of executives placed communication ahead of other soft skills as an “extremely important” skill in today’s workplace (Robles, 2012, p.455). Strong and well developed communication skills help establish credibility and build working relationships. The ability to verbalize understanding of one’s job duties and to ask relevant questions provides a foundation for significant contributions. For example, a customer may call with a question, but not know the correct terminology to use.

The employee’s ability to ask probing questions and decipher the customer’s question is necessary for accurate resolution.

SKILL DEMONSTRATION

Strong communication skills are demonstrated via written and oral mediums. Written mediums include memos, e-mails, and business documentation. Oral mediums include telephone calls, meetings, and listening. The following paragraphs illustrate both mediums.

Strong written communication provides a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. The
A written document should be able to stand alone from its writer to convey ideas and opinions. The tone should complement the subject material to highlight important areas or appropriately discuss sensitive topics. For example, a memo regarding changes in attendance policy should highlight to employees the importance of understanding the material, showing compliance with company policy.

Keen oral communication is highlighted by use of pace, tone, and word choice. Pace refers not only just to speed of discussion, but also to pauses that allow the participants to digest the message. Tone is important to convey the mood of the message. Messages that initiate change may include a tone of curiosity while messages that include consequences should have a serious tone. The choice of words is important depending on the audience. Within a group of peers jargon or acronyms may be used. However, when speaking with an external customer or new employee, the choice of words should be informative and educational.

Listening is defined as the aptitude to understand and provide responses effectively to oral communication (Rane, 2011). Active listening is demonstrated through eye contact and mirroring. Eye contact enhances the concentration of the individual receiving the message. Mirroring, or paraphrasing the intended point received, helps keep sender and receiver on the same path. For example, if an employee solicits help from a teammate to sort reports by last name then by region, the teammate should repeat the instructions back to ensure understanding. The employee soliciting help should listen for understanding from the teammate so that the request is understood in order to avoid additional steps.

**CONSEQUENCES OF UNDEVELOPED SKILL**

There are negative consequences in the workplace when communication skills are undeveloped. A significant portion of today's workplace involves working closely in team settings. An inability to communicate amongst peers and clearly share thoughts with co-workers inhibits successful job performance (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). Many employees are expected to provide written input into their own performance evaluations. When employees can effectively highlight their strengths and candidly discuss developmental needs, they create the opportunity for richer career discussions.

A deficiency in active listening can lead to incorrect decisions if the entire message is not digested. Supervisory positions are expected to have a higher need for listening skills in order to understand the interaction and morale of employees (Rane, 2011). Therefore strong listening skills are important for job advancement. For instance, if an employee shares with his or her supervisor a plan to revise customer billing data and if the supervisor does not engage in further conversation to understand which pieces of billing data will be changed, a problem could occur. Though the supervisor has invoice generation oversight, the dialogue does not reveal if the employee's plan will have a negative impact on creating the next set of invoices.
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Students have several options to strengthen communication skills in the areas of written, oral, and active listening capabilities. Students can ask for feedback from instructors on written assignments. Additionally, students may seek out writing workshops. A local library may also be a good place to explore writing opportunities. Students may also check for a local Toastmasters club. Toastmasters is an international organization which holds meetings to develop communication skills, typically in the area of presentations. To practice and identify effective listening habits, students should pursue articles on the topic and practice in both personal and professional life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- English Composition Guide:  http://guides.rasmussen.edu/generaleducation/englishcomposition
- Writing Effective E-mails:  http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/EmailCommunication.htm
- Toastmasters International:  http://www.toastmasters.org/
- 10 Steps to Effective Listening:  http://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/
References


