

The 5 Communication Skills Every Effective Leader Uses Daily

What is the difference that makes the difference? What is it that some leaders do that others do not? Why are some leaders more effective than others? It is not the MBA or the PhD. It is not the title on the door or even the years of experience. It is something much more intangible than that. It is all in how they communicate. This includes what you say, what you don't say, how you say it, what you believe, your temperament and even your eye contact. Whether we want to or not, we are always "saying" something- we are always communicating.

So how can you improve your effectiveness through communication? First, decide that you will work on this subtle, yet critical part

of your leadership package. It is not taught in school, and unfortunately there are not a lot of great role models in the workplace (yet!). If you are lucky your organization pays for training, or better yet, brings it into the organization to help each person get better at it. Meanwhile, you get to find articles (like this one) and books and mentors to model after.

So in an effort to make your life easier, and to give you practical easy to understand and use tips on being more effective in your leadership-ness, take into account the following FIVE Skills:

Listen.

Listening, truly listening and not just hearing is a powerful way to communicate. Yes, you communicate when your mouth is shut. Learning to listen needs to be taught because of how humans are wired. We are naturally ego-centric and want attention. We want to be heard (see next topic). We want to share our ideas, make contributions, and demonstrate what we know. And we often do this by talking.

Learning to listen requires that you focus 100% on the other person. It is not about you; it is all about them. No matter what you have to offer to the conversation, listening without interruption.

More importantly listen without judgment or an agenda. This is not as easy as it sounds.

Here's how to actively listen and focus 100% of your attention on the other person:

- Start with the basics: select a place where you won't be interrupted, shut down all technology devices and develop and maintain eye contact.
- Set your intention: plan on being in receiving mode, not in advisory mode. When you truly listen, your only objective is to fully understand the other person's position. Be in a state of curiosity.
- Take notes: write down thoughts so you're not thinking about them in hope of remembering them.
- Ask questions to fully understand and enable the person to fully explore their point of view. Some people do their thinking when they talk and can have some great ideas when being listened to.
- Before responding **ask if they want your input!** Yes, ask before you jump in. Not everyone wants your opinion, but they want to be heard.

When you listen, really listen, you honor the person in front of you. And you broaden your frame of mind by learning a new or different perspective. This is how you become more flexible in your leadership presence.

Inside this Article:

Listen.	1
Validate and Appreciate	2
Let Go	2
Feedback	3
Communicate often	4

Validate and Appreciate

Nothing is more painful to the ego than not being “seen” or recognized for your talents. It erodes your self-esteem and therefore your productivity. When leaders embrace this simple human need, and apply 1 minute of effort to fill this need, amazing things can happen.

Here are some sample ways to validate and appreciate:

[Joe] I noticed you have been working late which I really appreciate during this busy season. Is there anything that you need to make this time a little more productive?

[Mary] thank you for the report. What thoughts do you have on this now that it is done?

[Sarah] You often have some great ideas which I really appreciate. What do you think about....

Sometimes it is simply the decision of: *I know how to do this, and can do it quickly. But let me use this opportunity to say: [Tom], I have this task to do. I think you could do it just as well as me. Would you take this on?*

Validate and appreciate is fast, free and easy. You can do it in person (best!) or even in an email (ok). When you go to the effort to hand write a note (very special!) the ROI is palpable. Go ahead, try this today and notice what happens in the next 2 days with the person.

Let Go

As a leader, the only way to help others is by **letting go**, so others can grow. Don't be fooled into thinking that just because you give someone something to do, that you are actually letting go. To truly let go requires faith, communication, and a point in time when you will review the situation. Be careful that you follow all three of these important parts, because one missed step, can create chaos, uncertainty, and the desire to take all the work back again.

Faith: If you don't believe the person can take on a task or responsibility, chances are they know that! And they will live up to your expectations! Evidence of this powerful (silent) communication is demonstrated in the term “Pygmalion Effect”. This term refers to

the phenomenon in which the greater the expectation placed upon people - often children or students and employees - the better they perform. People tend to live up to what's expected of them and they tend to do better when treated as if they are capable of success. So faith is your first step to truly letting go.

Communication: Be sure to spend enough time with the individual to fully transfer the task or responsibility. This will obviously be dictated by the complexity, but in a nutshell share these six categories: *why* is this task is important; *how* does it fit into the bigger picture; *how* have you done it in the past or how would you like it done; *when* is it due; *who* needs to be a part of the process; and finally *check for understanding*. Ask for them to repeat back

to you what you have shared to check for comprehension. And make sure that they feel safe in coming back to you for clarification. This is done simply by the tone of your voice.

Review: Make sure you set a date and time to review the effort of transfer. (See Appreciation above, and Feedback below). Without review, even if it is just acknowledging the work, you will not be in a position to decide when to let go again. Reviewing is the fastest way to get to Faith, because you can correct, compliment or agree on how the project/task went.

E.g.: Helium balloons- where the gap occurred:

My new team member needed a task to do to help the upcoming event. I gave her “decorations” which was limited to 200 helium balloon clusters. This is how it went:

Faith: I knew she could do it. This was not that complex and did not require the intricacies of some of the other parts of the event (like how we increase electrical capacity for a one day event?)

Communication: I said to her....*helium balloons are the key decoration for this event* (how does it fit into the bigger picture). *Can you be sure that we have (x#) helium balloons for this event by the start time at 7am* (when is it due). *Let me know if you need any help*. Check for understanding: *Any questions?* Hint: this is where the gap occurred!

Result: She purchased balloons in a bag, and then rented a helium tank. All this was delivered to the office (not the site of the event). The day before the event, she hauled the stuff to the event location and, with several other “volunteers” blew up the balloons the night before. We arrived on site at 5:30 am only to find the balloons floating precariously close to the ground. YIKES! She freaked. I prayed, and calmly asked her to find a way to replace the balloons. She of course is not thinking, and I realize that this is my entire fault! Together we came up with the benefit that we still had helium and all night drug stores usually carry balloons. We recovered...but not without anxiety and chaos.

Lesson Learned: Be sure your communication is complete. I was so determined to “let go” that I did not share the simple idea I had for the issue: call the helium delivery service and have all the balloons delivered at 5:30 am the day of the event. This was in the budget, and sharing this idea with her could have been much more rewarding for all involved.

We reviewed, and I am certain she won't ever be renting a helium tank again. (Do you know how heavy those things are?). And my lesson, is not to be too brief in the handoff. Take the time to let go with details.

Feedback

We all need it, most of us want it, some of us crave it, and it is hard to grow without it. So why is this communication technique so underutilized? Because of poor experiences (sometimes painful) of receiving feedback.

It is human nature to avoid conflict (although not exclusively), and in the past we may have been given feedback in a crude or unskilled manner that deflated us rather than inspired us. So we think feedback is bad. We avoid giving it, because the only model you have had to follow was painful.

What if you could learn to give feed-

back that was constructive, inspiring and even measureable? Whether it is for great performance (see validate and appreciate above), corrective/constructive skills development, or non-compliant behavioral feedback, we all benefit from this information. Every great leader knows how to do this and can use this communication skill every week.

When you choose to engage nonperforming team members in the feedback conversation, you will get insights to what the root cause is for the lack of understanding. You have the opportunity to truly change their lives for the better. Learning this skill can save you hours of

anxiety and frustration with underperformers, and enable you to create loyalty with your high performers.

Here is a formula and an example for the most needed of feedback: constructive feedback:

1. State the facts: *On (date/dates) I noticed (state behavior). Is this correct?*
Tom, I noticed the last three weeks you have been arriving 15 to 20 minutes late. Is this right?
2. State the company philosophy regarding the desired change.
You may recall that our policy is to begin the day at 8:30 so that we are all on the same start time.
3. Check in: *Is there something you don't understand or did you forget?*
You remember this right? And what would be causing you to be late?
4. Fully listen to the response; ask another question if it helps you understand this person's situation.
See listening!
5. Create a statement of the desired change.
I understand, and would like to hear your ideas on how you can get back to the 8:30 am arrival time. (note that you may have to negotiate this to accommodate an interim situation (eg: childcare arrangements are in flux). This is where you can discover a solution that you can both agree to.
6. Check in again...*Can you do this?*
7. State a consequence if the behavior continues.

On first offenses this may not be necessary. Note that lasting changes in behavior **requires** consequences. Using this formula can keep the emotions out of the conversation, and can easily be used by anyone in your organization. Even when non-compliant behavior is severe, this can be the foundation for the conversation. Don't miss the opportunity to give feedback on a regular basis. As the leader, the more you do it the better the outcome for all.

Communicate often

Speaking of often....one of the most common concerns I hear in all companies is lack of communication. Many leaders believe that if I told you once, you will understand it. This is far from the truth especially when it comes to communicating change.

In addition, we all learn differently. Some of us are fine in capturing the gist of the message with a conversation. But most of us need the double decker communication sandwich:

conversation + visual + conversation.

And we need it more than once.

Consider all mediums: email, text, phone, face-to-face, im-

promptu and planned. Printed, verbal and visual expression of the same message may seem redundant to you, but trust me when I tell you, repetition is the key to success. (How many times in your life did you tell your children to brush their teeth? Point made).

Communicate often and using different mediums does not take more time...it saves you time, energy and frustration in the long run.

Try this the next time you want to get a point across. And if you want, let me test it for you! Yes as a communication expert, I will critique your delivery methods and guide you to a better message.

That is all for now. Just one last question: Which of the **5 Communication Skills Every Effective Leader Uses Daily** will you use today? And which will you try tomorrow. Take a moment right now and put these five tips in your calendar to "try on" in the next 5 to 10 days. Otherwise these ideas may get wrapped up in the folder you file this report in. Don't miss the opportunity to be a better communicator: Schedule it before you file it!

Freddi Donner is a seasoned executive coach specializing in the power of communication and interpersonal skills to achieve professional growth and business development goals. Freddi founded Business Stamina in 2004 after more than two decades as a corporate marketing executive and successful entrepreneur. She is certified by the International Coaching Federation and is an accredited practitioner of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment. She also holds a clearance to work in secure government environments.

Freddi helps professionals discover the resources within to build personal presence and stamina at work. Her dignified, safe and convenient coaching environment helps leaders and managers assess their personality types and communication styles, and understand how these characteristics affect workplace relationships and business success. Freddi's candid and supportive coaching style helps clients use this awareness to build strategies for personal engagement and business development that are as comfortable and natural as they are effective.

As a veteran entrepreneur and executive, Freddi keeps the focus on practical, real-world objectives that turn everyday interactions into opportunities to advance business goals. What's the best business networking approach for a given personality type? Which method of time and information management can complement a person's behavior patterns and life experiences? How can a standout technician augment software expertise with the "soft skills" needed to manage people after – or in pursuit of – that big promotion? Through group and individual sessions, Freddi helps clients find these answers and leverage them for professional and personal success to help them build business stamina.

A thought leader on leadership skills, stress management, teamwork and related subjects, Freddi offers team development workshops, retreats, and individual coaching for those who wish to build internal strength.



Freddi Donner, ACC
www.businessstamina.com
571.266.7600