

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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Communication Skills, Part IV

This is the fourth article in a series about communications in the workplace. In our March Newsletter we looked at body language, energy patterns, and listening skills. This month we invite you to participate in a “Communication Skills Checkup” and to develop your own action plan. If you are new to our Newsletters, feel free to send along comments or questions to info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com.

A Communication Skills Checkup

For the purpose of self-awareness only, rate yourself from 1 - 5 (with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent) on the following statements. After you have finished, go back and revisit those areas that you would like to



improve. Take from one to three areas and make an action plan to (1) increase your awareness of when your communication behavior is not “up to snuff” and (2) change that behavior through specific steps.

How often do I demonstrate the following behaviors:

- 1 Center myself before engaging in a “crucial conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
- 2 Be aware when I’m becoming defensive and take a deep breath. 1 2 3 4 5
- 3 Exercise self-control by asking, “How important is this

- 4 in the longer-term perspective?” 1 2 3 4 5
- 4 Not listen because I’m thinking ahead to my response. 1 2 3 4 5
- 5 Multi-task while the other person is talking with me. 1 2 3 4 5
- 6 Start a conversation with someone without asking whether the person has time to talk. 1 2 3 4 5
- 7 Use verbal and nonverbal “encouragers” to draw a person out. 1 2 3 4 5
- 8 Maintain good eye contact. 1 2 3 4 5
- 9 Pay close attention to my body language. 1 2 3 4 5
- 10 Be aware of the other person’s changing body language. 1 2 3 4 5
- 11 Give the speaker feedback on what I heard him/her say. 1 2 3 4 5
- 12 Ask the other person to share his/her feelings about the situation. 1 2 3 4 5
- 13 Allow my attention to drift to other tasks I have to do. 1 2 3 4 5
- 14 Discourage the other person from contributing option. 1 2 3 4 5
- 15 Reflect or summarize the content of the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5

My Action Plan: An Example

First Area of Improvement: *Need to stop multitasking during communication.*

Awareness of Need for Improvement

Date: 3/15/— Incident: *checking e-mail while on phone*

Date: _____ Incident:

Date: _____ Incident:

IMPROVEMENT PLAN:

- 1 CONSCIOUSLY TURN AWAY FROM COMPUTER WHEN ANSWERING THE PHONE.
- 2 REQUEST TO RETURN CALL WHEN I CAN DEVOTE FULL ATTENTION TO IT.
- 3 SCHEDULE FACE-TO-FACE MEETING AT TIMES WHEN BOTH PERSONS CAN PUT ASIDE OTHER CONCERNS FOR THE DURATION.

Conflictual Situations

We have already seen that, even in the best of situations, communication can be difficult. There is an external environment in which dialog occurs, and this can be interpreted by one person as safe and by the other, as compromised. There are the two internal environments (each speaker has his/her own), with their physical, emotional, and intellectual filters, as well as any prejudices or other distortions. Then there is the message itself, of which the kernel is the *meaning* the speaker intends to convey. Once the spoken words go through all the various filters and distortions of the

external and internal environments, what is conveyed may mean something quite different from what the speaker intended.

Now, however, we are looking at a content that is *already predisposed to miscommunication — a conflictual situation*. This state of affairs is already marked by one or more misunderstandings, which usually result in at least one party feeling hurt, unappreciated, misunderstood, angry, frustrated, or numb to the point of being apathetic (as a defense against painful emotions). Sometimes it takes a mediator to help both parties come to a solution that each can accept. Here are some basic concepts, however, that may help you to resolve or at least come to a “truce,” which allows both parties to resume a working relationship: *

- Remember that you want to arrive at a point where you can *dialog* with the other person.
- To get to dialog, several things must be in place. The first of these is a safe atmosphere, where everything that is said remains confidential.
- You need constantly to be observing yourself and asking, “Am I really telling the truth now? Or

*The material in this section is adapted from *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson et al. New York: McGraw Hill, 2002.

- am I operating from the premise that I am helpless or a victim?” “Have I moved to an aggressive or controlling state?”
- Have both of us identified a mutual purpose that underlies our working together?
- Is either one of us going to silence or to violence (verbal aggression)?

SILENCE OR VIOLENCE?

Let’s explain what Kerry Patterson and his co-cauthors meant by “silence” and “violence.” These two terms

are the extremes of self-defeating communication. In silence, we can



- Mask the real issue, especially by becoming sarcastic or using rhetorical questions.
- Avoid the issue by

changing the topic.

- Withdraw from the conversation either by staring into space or by physically leaving the room.

Included in the term “violence” are the following behaviors:

- Controlling the conversation by speaking louder, permitting, no interruptions, “filibustering,” using directive questions, overstating the facts (using words such as “never” and “always”) and otherwise manipulating the conversation.
- Labeling persons by name-calling or insinuating some stereotypical behavior.
- Attacking the receiver or another person by accusing or laying blame.

Under stress it is easy to go either to silence or to violence. We need to identify our own style and work to combat it, with the goal of becoming a better person — a better employee, a better boss, a more mature partner or parent.

Next month we continue our series on communication in the workplace by addressing the topics of

- 1 Telling ourselves “stories,” which distort communication, and
- 2 Communicating using the tools of personality type

See page 3 for contact information and seminar offerings.

Stay tuned to Beyond the Horizons Consulting Newsletters for timely information to solve your management challenges! Please feel free to write us at

info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com

or to call us at 505-466-4990 to schedule a free, complimentary coaching session or consultation for your business needs.

Beyond the Horizons Consulting offers a variety of services for individuals, teams, and organizations.

- ◆ Individual coaching for managers is a process that begins by identifying your style, what you want to retain and strengthen, and what you want to modify. Objective assessments are part of the process, as are also a mutual give-and-take process of creative problem solving and supportive guidance.
- ◆ We offer group seminars on identifying and dealing with stress in a relaxing and supportive environment.
- ◆ Our team building seminars will help your team or department run more smoothly, whether it is a brand-new team or one that has been put together after a reorganization.
- ◆ Our communication seminars identify crucial parts of the communication equation and help you put them all together by using role play, among other practical, hands-on experiences.

- ◆ We also offer group seminars utilizing excellent tools, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the DISC.
- ◆ Our conflict resolution services help opposing parties identify mutual purpose(s) and restore harmony to your workplace environment.
- ◆ It is our pleasure to tailor a seminar to your company's, department's, or team's needs!

Take a look at our May and June, 2005, Newsletters to see our new, serene home, a place we invite you to take advantage of!

Call us to schedule a complimentary consultation for yourself or your business!

Our helpful Office Administrator, Stan, will work with you to schedule a meeting time that fits your schedule.

**Stan and Jean Eva can be reached at
(505) 466-4990**