

Nearly every survey of an organisation's climate, managerial practices, or culture will have one thing in common. When an employee is asked to identify what needs improvement, the number one area of concern is COMMUNICATION!

The ability to communicate effectively with others is vital to every aspect of our lives. In business, our success is reliant upon the development of healthy working relationships. Achieving these is dependent on being understood, understanding others and communicating well together.

We communicate all the time, yet rarely think about it. We often communicate without being fully aware of the message we are really sending, yet the way we pass a message can have direct bearing on the eventual outcome. The words we use, how we say them and the non-verbal signals that accompany them can make all the difference.

Communication often breaks down because what is being said is not always heard. We have a tendency to give and receive information in a way that makes us feel comfortable.

Understanding our own personal communicating style and recognising that of others enables us to adapt and improve the effectiveness of our communication. Therefore, we need to adapt to different styles for different people.

An important aspect when communicating with others is to recognise the other person's preferred style of behaviour and adapt your style to theirs, rather than imposing your style on them and trying to force them to operate in the way that you do. There are several well-recognised styles of behaviour. Here we look at a simple system of four styles that people may have:

- **Direct**
- **Analytical**
- **Social**
- **Conceptual**

Now that we understand the four different styles, let's turn our attention to how we can modify our style to fit with each style. Here's some ideas for each, starting with the **Direct Style**

Direct people want to know the "bottom line" and are interested in the communication being as quick and effective as possible. For this style your communication should be precise, quick and concentrating on the key points only.

Analytical people like to know all of the background and details. For them you need to spend a lot of time explaining all of the **details**, give them time to digest the **information** and plan a follow up to **allow them to ask any further questions. Communication should be detailed.**

Social people like to build a relationship with you prior to discussing the point in hand. It is important for you to start by discussing social or other matters with them and to allow them time to digress during the communication to talk about other things that are concerning them. Communication should be **informal, relaxed and friendly.**

Conceptual people are attracted by the ideas or concepts which you are putting over, but are not very interested in the detail. They may want to debate the concepts with you. This style of person likes pictures and can quickly grasp the information which you are trying to communicate. Communication should be **visual, quick** and concentrating on the **concepts** rather than the details.

Let's now turn our attention to influence.

A huge amount has been written about influence and academic research has summarised six principles of influence, these are:

Reciprocity - If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. People feel obliged to do things in return for someone who has done something for them.

Authority - People are more persuaded if they recognise the influencer's authority.

Social Proof - "Everyone else is doing it". Seeing other people take the same course or lean a certain way makes someone more likely to be persuaded.

Commitment & Consistency - People are more likely to be influenced when they have made a small commitment or are acting in a way that are consistent with how they see themselves.

Liking - People are more likely to be convinced by someone they like. Liking comes from things like humour, similarity, attractiveness.

Scarcity - People are more likely to be persuaded when they have a sense of scarcity. That might be a deadline (scarcity of time) or availability ("it's the last one in the store").

Here are some more tips for you to consider;

Emphasise the relevance Relevance increases motivation, and communications are more acceptable and better understood when they are relevant to the receiver's needs.

It is often useful to point out the relevance of a communication at the beginning;

- In reports by a written summary
- In presentations by a short outline
- In informal communications by a brief explanation of the reason and purpose

Go multi-media, multi-channel People accept inputs through several senses. Visual inputs have higher power, so use them to reinforce written or spoken messages whenever you can. Use more than one channel (e.g. telephone calls to reinforce emails).

Match words with deeds Messages are more effective if you act in ways which are compatible with your words. A reputation for honesty, reliability and accuracy increase credibility and impact of your message.

Use 'KISS' Keep It Short and Simple. This applies to written and spoken communication. The more clear and concise, the more likely your message will get through. Avoid using complicated phrases when short words will do. Remember, people usually find it hard to understand abstract concepts unless examples are given.

Choose the right time If the person receiving your message is feeling irritable, harassed, over-tired or anxious, or is about to rush off, it may pay to wait until a more appropriate moment.

Remember: seek to understand before being understood, and try to achieve a result where both sides win. This will help develop a level of commitment now and a better chance of agreement next time.

Thanks for listening.