



Essential Management Skills

Part 2 - Great Communication Skills Are Part Of The TOP Managers Armoury

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Welcome to session 2! I'm glad you made it! I hope you enjoyed session 1?

This session is all about Communication Skills.

To be honest, if you haven't got excellent communication skills you are probably going to struggle as a manager.

I have seen so many TOP managers have great levels of knowledge and skills but they couldn't communicate what they know and what they wanted to a plank of wood!

I have also seen great communicators, the people's person, generate tremendous results even though they do not have a great level of knowledge and skill about what they are doing.

Either way, YOU need to have great communication skills because your WHOLE ROLE is about getting results through others.

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Why are excellent communication skills so important?

In your role as a manager you have gone past that stage in your career where you have had to roll your sleeves up and complete the "doing".

Well, in theory anyhow! In the real world you still have to muck in and do the do!

You've earned your stripes over the years no doubt, that's why you are where you are today.

Now is the time to step back and look at the direction that your company, team or department needs to be moving towards.

Now is the time to formulate strategy and plans.

Seeing as you will not be actually physically carrying out your plans you need to get others to carry them out for you.

You need to communicate your requirements in a motivating and empowering way that gets others to complete the tasks and activities to a high standard and within budgetary and time constraints.

You have a vision in your mind and you need to communicate this to everyone.

You are seen as someone who is very successful in your company and hence staff will be looking to you to set the example - they need to be impressed with the way that you come across as a leader, as a motivator, as a front man/woman, and as someone who can stand up and speak comfortably in front of others. Therefore, communication skills are vital to the TOP manager!

How effective are your communication skills?

Here is a quick way of assessing the effectiveness of your communication skills.

It will provide a starting point from which you can work from. Please answer the questions below:

- Can you make small talk easily?
- How comfortable do you feel when meeting people for the first time? Can you hold a conversation?
- If you had to speak in front of 50 people with 24 hours' notice would you feel okay about it?
- Can you express your opinion in an objective manner without getting angry?
- Can you hold motivating conversations? Do you find this easy?
- How well can you communicate bad news?
- How well do you manage conflict in the office?
- Can you communicate effectively with people at all levels?

Have a look at your answers and see if there are any patterns that emerge.

For example, you might be great at dealing with conflict and giving tough messages out but when it comes to motivating people you just don't know how to do this.

Or, you might feel comfortable when speaking in front of groups but haven't got a clue how to make small talk with just one person.

Have a think about these and jot down some ideas of what you can do to improve your skills in each area.

Learn how to communicate a vision and strategy

As a manager it is your role to map out a vision for others to follow whether that be for the whole company, your department or your team

But how do you communicate that vision effectively? Here are some tips:

- Use visual diagrams where possible. The old saying of "A picture tells a thousand words" is so true.
- Explain/illustrate where you are now and where you need to be so that your staff can build up a mental picture
- Sell the BENEFITS to your staff of why you are following this route of action.
- Sell the BENEFITS to your staff of "What's in it for them?"
- Anticipate questions up front. Sit down and put yourself in the shoes of a cynical staff member and brainstorm all of the tough questions that they could come out with.
- Map out answers to those questions in the bullet point above.
- Have supporting documentation, either a brochure or document that explains things fully. Staff will want to take it away and have a good study afterwards.
- Put a support structure in place where people can go to get their questions/concerns answered after the communication.

Follow the above tips and you will come across as a motivating and well-prepared manager!

Learn how to make effortless rapport from the cleaner all the way up to the chairman

Are you one of those people who meets someone new for the first time, you get past the "Hello" and then a tumbleweed breezes across the floor!

If so, you are not alone!

Meeting people for the first time and keeping that conversation going can be a very daunting task, but it needn't be the case.

If you understand all about other people and how they like to communicate and what they like to talk about, then meeting people for the first time can be an enjoyable experience.

Honestly! Here's how.

The problem with meeting new people or people who you do not know very well is that you tend to find that you put yourself under pressure to talk.

What should I talk about? What shall I say? How will I fill this silence in the conversation?

You enter into these meetings and encounters with ME ME ME on your mind!

You forget about communicating with the other person because you are too busy thinking of what to say!

In fact you don't end up communicating you just end up taking it in turns to talk!

Let me tell you something now that may shock you. The best conversationalists in this world are the best listeners.

In fact, the person who says the least is often the best communicator yet you are there wracking your brains thinking of things to say all of the time.

Here is a top tip:

BECOME AN EXPERT LISTENER

Let me explain why.

When you become an expert listener it means that the other person is doing most of the talking.

When you go into a situation where you are meeting someone for the first time go into that encounter with only one thing on your mind – THEM.

You must treat that person as they are the most important person in the world, because to them they are!

To build up rapport and to engage in a conversation ask questions and be intrigued about the other person not yourself.

So, what do you talk to the other person about? Well, like I said before, you don't! You let them do most of the talking and by doing this they will think that you walk on water and will in turn ask about you and that's when YOU talk!

So how do you engage the other person into talking?

To do this it is important to understand what other people like to talk to about.

Here is the TOP 5 in order:

1. THEMSELVES!

People love to talk about themselves.

It's a fact and I bet you are not an exception to that rule either!

Want to know how to build rapport with someone and to hold a conversation?

Get them to talk about their favourite subject – THEMSELVES!

- "What are YOU currently doing career wise?"
- "Do YOU enjoy it?"
- "Tell me about this....."
- "I hear YOU have been doing this....."

At a party:

"Hi, how do you know the "party host"?"

"I know him because we went to school together."

"What school was that?"

"Gosford Park"

"Did YOU enjoy it there? What did YOU study?"

Ask questions to get them to talk about themselves and then ask some more questions, and then some more!

He or she will love you for it!

2. THEIR OWN OPINIONS

Second only to talking about themselves, people love to air their opinions on anything and everything.

Ask these questions as well and your new friend could be talking for hours!

"What do you think of the way Manchester United have played this year?"

"What is your opinion on the strike?" "What do you think of XYZ programme?"

However, whatever you do, don't get into an argument if your opinions differ, unless of course you want to make a sharp exit!

3. OTHER PEOPLE

People love to talk about other people.

Some people call this gossip, others just call it talking about other people!

"What do you think of xyz person?"

"Hasn't xyz person got great interpersonal skills?" "Isn't xyz person a real laugh?"

4. THINGS

Next on the pecking order is talking about things.

No matter what it is, your friend will have an opinion on it. "I love YOUR car, how long have YOU had it?"

"What do YOU think of this widget?"

"I love YOUR jacket, where did you get it from?"

5. YOU!

It's a horrible thing to say but the last thing people want to talk about is YOU!

Keep the conversation centred around the other person until they ask about you and then it is your turn.

To keep their full attention wait until they have finished talking about themselves and they have asked you a question.

Then you can talk.

When you do talk however, link it into what the other person has already said and you will really be making magical rapport.

ACTION PLAN

Here are my top tips for building effortless rapport!

1. Don't worry about what to say just go into each conversation with the other person in mind.
2. Listen and ask questions about the other person.
3. Then ask some more questions!
4. Think about "YOU" instead of "I"
5. Talk about the other persons favourite 5 subjects in order!
6. Don't talk about yourself until the other person asks
7. Have fun and don't take it too seriously!

Networking - Why do it? Are you doing it? Are you any good at it?

Did you know that you can greatly enhance the performance of your team and your company through networking?

One of the things about networking is that there can be a lot of mystique attached to it. There is the idea that networking is something you do in a strict business setting where you exchange business cards, etc.

Actually, networking is simply building and developing relationships with other people - anywhere! Even if you don't think you have a network, you do - think of all the people you know, the people with whom you have worked, whom you have met at conferences, at dinner parties, etc. All of these people are part of your network already. And, you come into contact with people on a daily basis - any one of them can become part of your network.

Sales are frequently developed through the relationships we have created with other people. Networking functions provide the opportunity to expand our contact list, particularly when we create and nurture quality relationships. It is not enough to visit a networking group, talk to dozens of people and gather as many business cards possible. However, every networking function has tremendous potential for new business leads. Here are five strategies to make networking profitable:

1. Choose the right networking group or event.

The best results come from attending the appropriate networking events for your particular industry. This should include trade shows, conferences, and associations dedicated to your type of business.

For example, if your target market is a Fortune 500 company, it does not make sense to join a group whose primary membership consists of individual business owners. You can also participate in groups where your potential clients meet. A friend of mine helps people negotiate leases with their landlords. He joined the local franchise association because most franchisors lease their properties.

2. Focus on quality contacts versus quantity.

Most people have experienced the person who, while talking to you, keeps his eyes roving around the room, seeking his next victim. This individual is more interested in passing out and collecting business cards than establishing a relationship. My approach is to make between two and five new contacts at each networking meeting I attend. Focus on the quality of the connection and people will become much more trusting of you.

3. Make a positive first impression.

You have EXACTLY one opportunity to make a great first impression. Factors that influence this initial impact are your handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, interest in the other person and your overall attentiveness. Develop a great handshake, approach people with a natural, genuine smile and make good eye contact. Notice the colour of the other person's eyes as you introduce yourself.

Listen carefully to their name. If you don't hear them or understand exactly what they say, ask them to repeat it. Many people do not speak clearly or loudly enough and others are very nervous at networking events. Make a powerful impression by asking them what they do before talking about yourself or your business.

As Stephen Covey states, “Seek first to understand and then to be understood.” Comment on their business, ask them to elaborate, or have them explain something in more detail. As they continue, make sure you listen intently to what they tell you. Once you have demonstrated interest in someone else, they will – in most cases – become more interested in you. When that occurs, follow the step outline in the next point.

4. Be able to clearly state what you do.

Develop a ten second introduction as well as a thirty second presentation. The introduction explains what you do and for whom. For example; “I work with boutique retailers to help them increase their sales and profits.”

This introduction should encourage the other person to ask for more information. When they do, you recite your thirty second presentation. “Bob Smith of High Profile Clothing wanted a program that would help his sales managers increase their sales

After working with them for six months we achieved a 21.5 percent increase in sales. Plus, sales of their premium line of ties have doubled in this time frame.” As you can see, this gives an example of your work and the typical results you have help your clients achieve. Each of these introductions needs to be well-rehearsed so you can recite them at any time and under any circumstance. You must be genuine, authentic, and as I recently heard a speaker say, “bone-dry honest.”

5. Follow up after the event.

In my experience, most people drop the ball here. Yet the follow-up is the most important aspect of networking. There are two specific strategies to follow:

First, immediately after the event – typically the next day – you should send a handwritten card to the people you met. Mention something from your conversation and express your interest to keep in contact. Always include a business card in your correspondence.

Next, within two weeks, contact that person and arrange to meet for coffee or lunch. This will give you the opportunity to learn more about their business, the challenges they face, and how you could potentially help them. This is NOT a sales call – it is a relationship building meeting.

Networking does product results.

The more people know about you and your business, and the more they trust you, the greater the likelihood they will either work with you or refer someone else to you.

My thanks to Aboodi Shabi (wonderfullife.com) & Kelley Robertson (robertsontraininggroup.com)

Public speaking techniques and tips

No communications section would be complete without some tips and techniques to deliver effective speeches!

Speaking in public, in front of groups and conducting presentations are commonly agreed as the least favourite activities that anyone can perform.

However, if we are well prepared, well equipped and well supported, you will find that speaking in public really can be quite enjoyable – honest!

Here are some ways to make public speaking an enjoyable experience both for yourself, as well as for your audience.

Here are some ways YOU can make speaking in public an enjoyable experience:

As much as possible/appropriate, include your audience

- You don't always have to be the talking head at a meeting. Prepare questions in advance that will encourage the audience to participate.
- Consider your audience in advance— Who are they? What might their histories and/or interests be?
- Prepare opportunities in your presentation/speech for audience participation.

Inject appropriate humour into your delivery

- It will do you good, enabling you to lighten up and release any tension. It will also enable the audience to loosen up, pay more attention, and receive you in a much more favourable way.

Share a little known fact

- Most audiences are especially grateful to hear something they haven't already heard before.
- One single piece of new information can make the time spent listening completely worth their while.
- If you can find one little known, yet especially relevant fact, you will have a captive audience.

Smile and the world smiles with you

- It's true!
- Others can sense your discomfort, and despite any earth shattering information you have to share, your audience is likely to discount your brilliance if the delivery of your key messages isn't clear and assertive.
- Instead remember to smile, make eye contact and believe your own words—and they will too.

Keep it relevant

- To the extent possible, make sure your audience is the right audience for the information you are presenting.
- In other words, don't lecture on retirement options to a newly graduating class.
- Know beforehand what you want to say and practice until it comes naturally.
- This will enable you to spend more time relating to your audience, than trying to remember what comes next in your delivery.

Create fun visuals (as appropriate)

- Some individuals will retain more if they are able to see graphic representations of the information you plan to deliver.
- Consider which parts of your message can be presented visually, and remember to keep visuals simple, attractive, and large enough so everyone can see them.
- Any fun, relevant clipart or comic can also be a nice perk.

So, what are the qualities of a good speaker?

Here are a list of the qualities and characteristics of a good public speaker/presenter.

Make sure you include these points when you have to speak in public.

- They talk to us as though we are having a conversation
- They speak our language
- They look as though they are enjoying themselves.
- They inspire us to find out more about the subject
- They tell stories/use the human-interest angle
- Someone who conjures up pictures in our mind
- They don't talk for hours
- They let us know where we are going
- They look at us-not their notes
- They stress important points and pause to allow ideas to sink in
- The talk appears well prepared but has an air of spontaneity

The importance of body language

Don't forget your non-verbal action signals!

You will want to look confident even though you may not be on the inside.

Don't just stand there, with your arms by the side of you! ACT CONFIDENTLY and you will FEEL CONFIDENT!

Try it, it really works.

So, how do you act confidently?

With your posture – walk tall with your head up.

- Smile
- Maintain eye contact
- Handshake
- Move around
- Gestures
- Relax

Speak with confidence as well

People will believe what they see more than what they hear, but once you look confident, you have to sound the part too!

- Breathing
- Sound quality of your voice
- Pitch
- Speed
- Tone
- Pausing
- Listening
- Use confident words

14 Ways to overcome your STAGE FRIGHT!

1. Be well prepared. Rehearse several times
2. Co-operate with your body – rest, eat and sleep well beforehand
3. Dress in clothes that make you feel good
4. Take several deep breaths to relax your body
5. Concentrate on the messages you want to get over to your audience
6. Move around and release your nervous energy. Visualise yourself doing well
7. Remember that your audience want you to do well
8. Think of a similar occasion in the past when you did it before and did it well. Think about it for a moment.
9. Make no negative confessions - "I'm so nervous"
10. Put the situation into perspective
11. If you get nerves during your talk, move around or do something different to get into a different "state"
12. Pick out some friendly faces and make eye contact with them
13. If you make a mistake you make a mistake, laugh at it and the audience with laugh with you. Make a joke out of it.
14. The more you do it the better you will become. Practise makes perfect.

I hope you got a lot of value out of that session?

Enhancing your communication skills is a vital aspect of your personal and professional development.

Have a think about where your strengths are with regards to communicating and also what your weaker areas are.

What can you do to bridge the gap?

Next time we will be talking about how to understand other people – if you get my drift?

About MTD



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Sean McPheat is the **Chief Executive Officer** of the multi-award winning **MTD Training Group**.

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