

Look around you. Have you ever noticed how effective leaders have the ability to naturally communicate with tact and professionalism? Coincidence? Not at all. Communication is more than the words we speak. Communication is about who we are, how we express ourselves, and how we relate to the world. Most importantly, communication is not only the message we deliver through verbal means, but nonverbal means as well.

True professionals:

- ◆ Realize that diplomacy works far better than force.
- ◆ Know how to help people understand their intended message the first time.
- ◆ Can empathize and relate with others, and know how to get the support they need.
- ◆ Listen first and act second — not the other way around.

The act of effective communication involves three components:

Verbal Communication

On a daily basis we work with people who have different opinions, values, beliefs, and needs than our own. Our ability to exchange ideas with others, understand others' perspectives, and solve problems depend on how effectively we are able to communicate.

Be clear about what you want to express—What do you most want the other person to understand? What is the primary idea, concept or message you want the other to understand as a result of your communication? Often, we spend more time speaking about superficial matters rather than addressing the core, significant and underlying concepts. To communicate effectively with another requires an inner clarity and thorough communication with yourself.

Precision matters—Expressing yourself effectively involves choosing your words precisely. Oftentimes, we're sloppy in our communication and speak in vague terms. What suffers are that concepts and feelings don't come across clearly. Effective communication involves using precise language—words that accurately reflect and express our ideas, experience, perceptions, dreams, and disappointments. (Tip: The more specific your words are, the more profoundly others will understand you.)

Active listening—Communication isn't only about the words a person speaks—it's also the silence between the words. We learn about each other by what we don't say as much as by what we say. We learn about each other by listening to which topics we discuss as well as the ones we avoid. What topics do you avoid during your conversations?

Nonverbal Communication

The power of nonverbal communication should not be underestimated. The messages we send through our body language and facial expressions account for 55% of what is perceived and understood by others. In fact, through our body language, we are always communicating, whether we want to or not!

Facial expression—The face is perhaps the most important conveyor of emotional information. A face can light up with enthusiasm and energy, express confusion or boredom, and frown with displeasure. The eyes are particularly expressive in conveying joy, sadness, anger, or confusion.

Postures and gestures—Our body postures can create a feeling of warm openness or cold rejection. For example, when someone faces us, sitting quietly with hands loosely resting comfortably on the lap, it can create a feeling of anticipation and interest. A

posture of arms crossed on the chest portrays a feeling of being closed off and inflexible. The action of gathering up one's materials and slightly turning away signals a desire to end the conversation.

Vocal Qualities

Vocal qualities refers to the messages that we transmit through the tone, pitch, and pacing of our voices. It is *how we say something*, not *what we say*. A sentence can convey entirely different meanings depending on the emphasis on words and the tone of voice. For example, the statement, "I didn't say you were late" has six different meanings, depending on which word is emphasized.

"I DIDN'T SAY you were late."

"I DIDN'T say YOU were late."

"I DIDN'T say you were LATE."

Some points to remember about vocal qualities:

- ◆ When we are angry or excited, our speech tends to become more rapid and higher pitched.
- ◆ When we are bored or feeling down, our speech tends to slow and take on a monotone quality.
- ◆ When we are feeling defensive, our speech is often abrupt.

Learning how to effectively express your views and ideas with tact and professionalism is an invaluable skill in any situation. Whether you are at work or at home, "communication works for those who work at it." ▶



What is Tact?

What is tact? Webster's Dictionary defines tact as: *a keen sense of what to do or say in order to maintain good relations with others or avoid offense.*

Interacting with colleagues and peers at work requires a different skill set than interacting with family or close friends. When tact is correctly displayed, it can create synergy in your office and improve teamwork. When tact is disregarded, it can cause chaos and create hostility in the workplace.

Think before you speak

Actively Listen

Control your emotions

Thoughts remain positive



Think Before You Speak

Choose your words carefully by always thinking before you speak. It is not what you say but how you say it.

Use Active Listening

Be in touch with your audience, "seek first to understand, then be understood." By actively listening, you are demonstrating that you respect the other person who is communicating with you.

Control Your Emotions

You can disagree without being disagreeable. Don't sweat the small stuff —and it is all small stuff. Defuse explosive emotions by keeping yours in check. This requires that you know yourself and take responsibility for your actions and words. Resolve conflict; do not add fuel to the fire. Recognize difficult situation and apply the appropriate skills.

Keep your Thoughts Positive

Be helpful and keep your attitude friendly. If you do this, even the most direct comments and feedback are projected in a constructive manner. Be confident and use effective diplomacy. This is the ability to achieve one's own ends yet avoid any unpleasantness or opposition.

Communicating with tact, diplomacy, and poise improves your ability to work with all types of people. You can't control others—instead focus on what is controllable: YOU!

"You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere."
~ Lee Iacocca

"The art of communication is the language of leadership."
~ James Humes

"Communication - the human connection - is the key to personal and career success."
~ Paul J Meyer