

Strategies for Clearer Communications

Clear communication is essential to both leadership and management. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your own communications:

Prioritize. It is important to establish priorities not only in your actions but in what you say to others. Make sure that you know how to emphasize what is most important.

Clear up misunderstandings. Bring misunderstandings out in the open before they become serious problems.

Resolve hanging issues. Don't let problems go unresolved; they won't go away—they will just fester.

Present new information. Most people will need new evidence to change their minds. Make sure to share all the information you have.

Be aware of impressions. Watch out for offensive facial expressions, gestures and body language. Particularly be cognizant of your tone of voice.

Clarify what is said. Paraphrase if it seems that the other person doesn't understand.

Show interest. Use eye contact to show the listener you are aware of his or her presence.

Think. Pause a moment and think before you speak.

To improve and master your communication skills, check AMA's numerous communications seminars at www.amanet.org

How to Free Employees to Be Creative

Savvy executives and managers give truth to their talk of shared goals and leadership by allowing staff



members to step out of their boxes and demonstrate their personal creativity in a supportive environment. After all, encouraging employee initiative makes sense.

By allowing employees a more active role in problem solving, executives and managers increase staff members' feelings of satisfaction with their jobs while freeing themselves to devote attention to planning and other leadership and management tasks.

The foundations are laid for staff to resolve problems on their own when executives and managers include employees in goal setting and development of action plans. But tapping into mission or goals isn't always sufficient. Nor do bromides about the value of employee initiative constitute a supportive environment for out-of-the-box thinking for staff members.

Executives and managers create an environment in which employees can safely show their initiative by following these guidelines:

Keeping all lines of communication open. By holding monthly staff meetings in which staff members share their efforts, managers provide employees with the information to make intelligent decisions when problems arise.

Listening. If you worry that you aren't always listening to your

employees' ideas, you may want to make an appointment with staff so an innovator will have your full attention

when he or she meets with you.

Giving frequent, objective and initiative-encouraging feedback. If problems arise when employees use their initiative, don't dwell on the problems so much that you discourage them from further risk taking.

Conducting ongoing training where it is evidently needed. If an employee makes a mistake in solving a problem, and it is likely that the problem might be encountered again, then you might want to have the person undergo training in that part of the solution where he or she is weak.

For more help with encouraging creative thinking, visit www.amanet.org

AMA Survey Facts

A survey by the Human Resource Institute on HR competencies found:

63.6% of respondents had a competency model for specific HR functions.

26.3% of respondents had a competency model for training and development.

18.8% have a model for staffing.

18.6% have a model for employee relations.

For information about the HR Institute, visit www.hrinstance.info

Work-Life Balance Tied to Corporate Competitiveness, Tied to Solid Management

study shows how leadership skills reduce employee stress and increase performance.

U.S. workers are putting in longer hours than ever before, resulting in increased stress, poor work-life balance and less confidence in corporate leadership, according to results of a new ISR employee opinion study.

The study, which involved 50,000 U.S. employees from financially high performing companies from a variety of markets, also identified management techniques that drive increased corporate revenues.

The employees who reported high levels of stress and poor work-personal life balance reported that their leaders were doing a less adequate job of setting clear direction and communicating to them about important matters and encouraging cooperation. Alternatively, the employee opinion study shows that employees reporting low levels of stress and strong work-personal life balance scored 74% favorable on their leaders' abilities to set direction, 75% favorable on communicating important matters and 89% favorable on encouraging cooperation.

"One of the more interesting findings that this study confirmed was the direct connection between good management practices and an improved bottom line," said Dr. Rebecca Masson, research director at ISR.



ISR compared the current study's results to similar recent employee satisfaction studies linking workplace culture to key business outcomes. They found managers who sufficiently staff their departments to handle the workload, avoid excessive workload, distribute work fairly, allow flexibility in scheduling, and are considerate of employees' lives outside the workplace, generate more satisfied customers, lower rates of absenteeism, fewer safety incidents and increased revenue.

According to an International Labor Organization report, U.S. workers are working long hours and those hours will grow even longer as baby boomers retire.

How can companies maintain a productive balance between work-personal lives for their employees in an age where the competition for talent is fierce?

"Recruiting the right people to promote your brand is vital," says Dr. Kim Morris, project director at ISR, "but employers need to invoke workplace strategies to thwart excessive workload from labor shortages by empowering employees from the bottom up. This can be accomplished through a variety of ways, such as training and development opportunities, encouraging and recognizing good performance, building team effectiveness and cooperation to distribute and share the load, leading with a clear sense of direction, and communicating important matters and decisions throughout the ranks."

ISR is an international employee research and consulting firm. For more information: www.isrsight.com

Prepare to Confront Conflicts Here's a checklist to help solve differences.

Whatever kind of conflict you wish to resolve, lack of preparation can hurt the conversation designed to end the disagreement, according to Erik J. Van Slyke, author of *Listening to Conflict*. In his book, he observes that "preparation takes time, but it also helps prevent problems that could occur throughout the resolution process."

Van Slyke offers this checklist to help you before you engage in conflict resolution:

- What is the nature of the disagreement? Consider both objective and personal issues.
- What is the position of each party?

- What are the stated and unstated goals?
- What does each party hope to accomplish?
- What interests, needs or motivations are represented by the positions? What does each party care about?
- If you were in the other party's shoes, what would you want?
- What do you and the other party have in common? Where are you already in agreement?
- What additional information, data or expertise do you need in order to understand the issues in this

conflict?

- What constituencies will influence the interaction?
- What will happen if you can't resolve the conflict? How will each party satisfy its interests?
- Do you want to resolve the conflict? Or should you cut your ties and find an alternative solution?

From *Listening to Conflict: Finding Constructive Solutions to Workplace Disputes* by Erik J. Van Slyke, Published by AMACOM, AMA's book division. Copyright by Erik J. Van Slyke. For more information about this book and other AMA book titles, visit www.amanet.org/books

For more help in conflict resolution, consider AMA's seminar "Responding to Conflict." For more infor-

Five Steps to Better Time Management

BY EVA WISNIK



An inescapable part of today's world of work is to be faced with projects and tasks that continually demand a response. Time management is an essential tool that will enable you to respond to these demands, fully and appropriately, on your own terms. As a result of employing time management techniques, you will be more focused and effective. By learning to plan, prioritize, organize and delegate activities more efficiently, you will enjoy greater job-confidence and be "on top" of your assignments, instead of feeling buried under them.

The following strategies may seem obvious, but they will only work if you establish goals, focus your priorities and take daily action steps to efficiently use your most limited resource—time.

1. Start your day with an action plan. Invest 15 minutes to plan each day. Identify the key goals for the day. Plan on how you can achieve these goals by breaking them down into manageable action steps. Make sure these goals are realistic; do not count on completing that week-long project in one day.

2. Take one action a day towards achieving your long-term goals. Block out 30 minutes each day to take action steps that will help you to accomplish your long-term goals. For example, although a new product introduction is due in six weeks, allocate 30 minutes each day to complete a small part of this long-term project to avoid a last-minute rush to complete the work on schedule.

3. Prioritize your tasks. Classify the steps that will generate the greatest results and confront more intimidating projects. Challenging projects lose their

intimidating force once you tackle them. Save tedious tasks, as well as projects with later deadlines, until after you have completed those items that you have identified as "most important." For example, when you come into the office early to draft a memo, do not allow yourself to be distracted by the beep of a new e-mail message.

4. Apply the 80/20 rule. In most areas of your life, you will find that 80% of your results come from 20% of your actions. Therefore, by identifying and focusing on the actions that will produce the greatest results, you will be most productive.

5. Learn to control interruptions. Interruptions are a normal part of the day. The phone will ring, e-mail will beep, and visitors will stop by unexpectedly. Too often by responding to interference, we *allow* ourselves to get interrupted. The trouble with interruptions is that it takes longer to recover from the interruption and refocus on the project than it takes to deal with the actual interruption.

In order to better control interruptions, you should:

- Always add in extra time for interruptions when planning your day.

- Return non-urgent phone calls in "batches" after important projects are completed.

- Answer e-mails only four times a day—twice in the morning and twice after lunch.

- Visit colleagues, as opposed to having them visiting you, so you can control the length of the visit.

Eva Wisnik is president of Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc. For more information: www.wisnik.com
Copyright Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc.

TREND WISE

The Socially Intelligent Leader

BY MARK VICKERS

By now, it's a given that business leaders need the ability to think strategically and execute well. Indeed, these abilities show up prominently in a recent study called "What Makes a Successful Leader," and they're a large part of the educational focus at business schools.

But that same study reportedly suggests leaders need other abilities that aren't as easily or as likely to be taught in schools.

One that's especially important is the capacity to build relationships. This skill is more an aspect of intuitive, right-brain thinking than rational, left-brain thinking, and it's a skill that could become more essential in coming years.

The Conceptual Age

In his book *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink argues that society is moving from the Information Age to something he calls the Conceptual Age, a time when creativity and high-touch characteristics, such as empathy, will become increasingly important to business success. Why empathy?

Partly because much of future business growth will be in the caregiver industries, such as health care or elder-care, where it's important to be able to see the world from the perspective of others. But, also, empathy is an aptitude that helps people build social relationships, which are critical in an increasingly networked world that depends on business alliances.

The Next "High Potentials"

If Pink is correct that the world is heading into the Conceptual Age, then employers will be looking more closely into ways of gauging and perhaps developing people's social intelligence. Certainly, people with the ability to use their whole mind rather than just the rational part of it could become the "high potentials" of the next several decades.

Mark Vickers is senior research analyst and editor for the HR Institute (www.hrinstute.info).



Here's what you'll find on the
AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

LEADERSHIP

Curiosity Saves the Leader. Curious George as a leadership role model? Management expert Sander A. Flaum explains how leaders can succeed by tapping into their "inner George." "Curiosity may have killed the cat," says, Flaum, "but it saves the leader—because if you're not curious enough to learn something new every day, you're dead."

Finding Your Own Leadership Style. There's nothing wrong with reading all the latest leadership books. Just keep in mind that when it comes to leadership styles, one size doesn't fit all.

MANAGEMENT

The Seven Deadly Sins of Management. In the workplace, the original "Seven Deadly

Sins" have been replaced by some even more sinister—arrogance, indecisiveness, negativism, etc. How many of these evils have you encountered—or even worse—exhibited?

SMALL BUSINESS

Creating an Image for Your Business. If you don't promote a unique, positive image of your business to your customers, they're likely to take their business elsewhere.

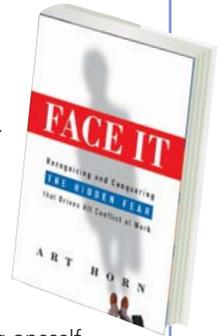
SALES & MARKETING

Why Do Sales Fail to Close? Between 60% and 80% of all lost sales are due not to your competition but to "no decision." Learn how you can help prospects see themselves using your product to achieve their goals, increase their urgency to take action and, finally, to turn that "no decision" into a definitive "yes."

Book of the Month:

Face It—Recognizing and Conquering the Hidden Fear That Drives All Conflict at Work, by Art Horn. What are you afraid of? *Face It* identifies the many types of fear that can keep talented professionals from reaching their full potential, offering practical techniques for freeing oneself from worry and self-doubt. Learn how to replace fear and mistrust with mutual respect and commitment to organizational goals.

For more information about this book and AMACOM's extensive catalog of business titles, visit www.amanet.org/books



AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

JULY 21, NEW YORK • Helping Women Leaders Thrive in Competitive Environments— Women today need to learn how to pursue goals in a competitive environment, act more strategically, build networks and take smart risks. Speaker is Kathryn Mayer, noted consultant on Women and Competition. Members \$25, Nonmembers \$50.

JULY 27 • Audio Conference. Why Employees Leave—Hear AMACOM author Leigh Branham discuss his concepts on retention. He believes that people are not enticed out of an organization by a better offer but pushed to the door by one of seven reasons. Special AMA price \$169.

SEPTEMBER 13-14, NEW YORK • World Business Forum: Ten Leaders. Two Days. One Forum. Hear different ways leaders

can transform themselves and their organizations to thrive in the increasingly complex global business environment. Radio City Music Hall. Special AMA price \$1,595.

SEPTEMBER 16, NEW YORK • Dealing with Crisis—How to change the "thinking" when dealing with a crisis. It is not enough to have business continuity and crisis management plans. There are seven competencies that companies must develop to deal with what is now a virtual certainty. Members \$25, Nonmembers \$50.

SEPTEMBER 18-21, SAN DIEGO • 13th Annual Administrative Professionals Conference—Dynamic keynoters, valuable skill-building sessions and learning from peers. Manchester Grand Hyatt. Go to www.apcevent.com

SEPTEMBER 29-30, LAS VEGAS • Corporate Branding 2005—Marketing professionals share leading-edge branding strategies and insights. Caesars Palace. Members \$1,795, Nonmembers \$1,995.

OCTOBER 14, CHICAGO • 4th Annual China Forum: Doing Business in Today's China—Intelligence professionals share insights. Members \$1,195, Nonmembers \$1,395.

OCT 20-22, LAS VEGAS • Sales Leadership 2005—A timely executive-to-executive exchange of ideas on how to use leadership to inspire your sales force to peak performance levels. Caesars Palace, Members \$1,695, Nonmembers \$1,895. Register by July 30, 2005, and save \$300.

For details and to register for any AMA event, go to www.amanet.org or call 1-800-262-9699.

Nonprofit
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 American Management
 Association International

American Management
 Association International™



1601 Broadway
 New York, NY 10019-7420

Executive Matters
 Member Newsletter
 July 2005 Issue