
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

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1. Types of Communication

- (i) To Inform
- (ii) To entertain
- (iii) To influence the thinking of others

While the first two types of communication have their roles in business, the third type, that is, to influence the thinking of others, is the most critical that determines the effectiveness of business executive. To be able to communicate and motivate others to favourable action is the very essence of business management.

2. Need for effective communication in business

When an organisation is small the entrepreneur makes all the day-to-day decisions. He, therefore, does not face any problem of communication. As the business grows larger and more complex in nature he needs to delegate some, if not all, of his authority to his subordinates or managers. He has also to interact with all sorts of people - workers, superiors, board directors, customers, suppliers, etc. Each of them is different and has his own set of personal peculiarities or tendencies, and these peculiarities in a person may change according to different circumstances. However, the fundamental working of one man's mind is the same as that of all others. Each person tends to think and act according to his self-interest. Personal conflicts will occur when a person's self-interest supersedes the interest of the organisation. One very important task of the manager, therefore is to ensure that everyone including himself will work for the organisation. In short, he needs a system of effective communication.

Effective communication calls for a clear and unambiguous organisation structure, well-defined authority and responsibility for everyone involved in the organisation—from the chief executive right down to the

office boy The business of the organisation, its objectives and missions and its corporate culture, have to be communicated and understood by everyone in the organisation so as to avoid any diffusion and misdirection of efforts. The business systems and operating manuals need to be written stating clearly how each task is to be performed. The organisation also has to establish its management information system so as to enable key personnel to make decisions based on correct information. Various working committees need to be formed from time to time to solve a given task requiring urgent attention such as workers' grievances.

3. The fundamentals for all communication

In all communication there are three factors present:

- 1) A sender
- 2) A message
- 3) A receiver

Effective communication is not a one-way process. It involves a two-way interpersonal relationship or reaction between the sender and the receiver.

There is no such thing as communication "downward". All we do is giving orders or commands. We cannot communicate downward anything connected with understanding, let alone motivation. This requires communication upward, from those who perceive to those who want to reach their perception. Circular letters to the employees no matter how well done, will be a waste unless the writer knows that employees can perceive, expect to perceive, and want to do.

Listening is a prerequisite to effective communication, though it cannot by itself work. Listening assumes that the superior will understand what he is being told and that the subordinates can communicate. Effective communication, therefore, requires interaction between the sender and the receiver and implies understanding of the message being communicated.

4. Facilitators for effective communication

There are several facilitators which a manager can use to ensure effective communication:

(i) Meetings

Meetings can be an indispensable part of an organisation's structure. Meetings may be necessary as an aid to the running of departments. They can also be vital in promoting interdepartmental co-operation which otherwise might not be achieved. The growing complexity of decision-making, caused partly by the diffusion of knowledge within organisations, means that very often decisions can only be taken effectively by groups of people coming together and pooling their knowledge and expertise.

However, there is need for considerable preparation prior to meetings and once meetings have started, they need to be chaired with skill. The skills required include the need to optimise contribution by the various members. The chair may contribute to the substantive discussions but should only do so when the issues have been properly identified. He should not use his position as chairman to exclude from the discussion members who may have important contributions to make; otherwise, they may feel neglected if they are not given the opportunity to contribute.

(ii) Counselling

Counselling is a way of relating and responding to another person so that the person is helped to explore his thoughts, feelings and behaviour with the aim of reaching clearer understanding. This is to enable people to work out how they will handle for themselves issues, problems or decisions that have to be made. The technique is necessary because it may be that it is only by this process that an issue can be understood and/or the commitment created that will lead to an appropriate course of action being taken by the person concerned.

Counselling may be a useful way of handling employee grievances. However, counselling techniques should first be mastered. In some situations the answer is simply to let people talk themselves out of their fury. Their frustration may require an outlet, and counselling techniques may help them to gradually dissipate their anger. At the end of it, an aggrieved person may actually thank the person to whom he has directed his anger for his help and go away reconciled to the situation. The dilemma for the person who has to handle the grievance is that if he openly agrees with the complaints, he may compromise his employer and, if he rebuts the complaints, he may infuriate the complainant. Neutral, but sympathetic, listening in many cases is not merely the only option but may be the answer.

5. Causes of communication breakdown

A breakdown in communication can also be caused by your voice and mannerisms. No one enjoys listening to a voice that is shrill, grating, rasping, piercing, or nasal; or to a speaker who talks too loudly

The person who speaks in a monotone, no matter how intelligent his discourse, will bore a listener. So will the speaker who uses vulgarism and poorly chosen words. Every listener has at one time or another been disconcerted by annoying speech mannerisms, such as constantly clearing the throat or ending sentences after tiresome remarks like "See", "To tell you the truth", "You're telling me", etc.

6. Unconscious communication

When you are face-to-face with a person or with an audience, there is an unspoken message in your communication that often speaks louder than words, causing a definite reaction from the receiver. It may be favourable, or it may be unfavourable. Every receiver uses five antennas to get your message: seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling. All of his impressions, good or bad, are received through one or more of these five senses. Displace any one of them and the inevitable result will be a definite breakdown in communication. There are times when what a receiver sees is deemed more important than what he hears. In fact, by your appearance he may prejudge you before you utter a single word. And first impressions are often lasting impressions.

7. The four factors for successful communication

Successful communication will depend upon how you look, what you say, how you say it, and what you do.

8. Become a good conversationalist

The best conversationalists have a broad cultural background. They generally have some knowledge of history, science, politics, art, music, sports and current topics. They are alive to what is happening in the world and quick to keep their conversation fresh and interesting.

9. Techniques for good conversation

One of the most important conversational graces is the ability to pay sincere and honest compliments. There is no person who does not enjoy

having his achievement recognised. Therefore, take the opportunity to remark upon a person's virtues, his skill in golf, tennis or other sports, his pleasing voice, promotion, taste in dress, or anything else you may hear or observe.

10. Make your conversation interesting

To make your conversation interesting, you must tailor it to include the contribution of others. The one-subject speaker invites others to avoid him because he lacks the ability to adapt himself to new or changed subjects. His world revolves around his own selfish interests. Strive to keep your conversation interesting by avoiding repetitious and rambling chatter. You can do this by varying your talk about people, things, ideas, and places as you pick up the speech-cues of others.

Do not attempt to educate people or to present a lot of heavy facts for a person's own good in your social contacts. A social gathering is an enjoyable activity. Therefore, light, gay, lively conversation is essential. Use wit and humour and tell amusing stories and you will contribute much to the party, even though your stories may lack professional perfection. Do not use stories, jokes, or sarcasm at the expense of others or you will invite social ostracism.

11. Tactlessness destroys friendship

Tactlessness comes from a lack of common courtesy and sensitivity for the feelings of others. A person is tactless:

- (i) when he interrupts
- (ii) when he argues and contradicts
- (iii) when he does not respect the opinions of others
- (iv) when he singles out one individual in a group
- (v) when he makes unpleasant remarks.

12. Conclusion

An executive may be a genius or has outstanding abilities, but as long as these qualities are hidden from others they are of no avail. It is not an exaggeration to say that the effectiveness of an executive is very much dependent upon his ability to communicate effectively with whoever he is in contact with such as subordinates, superiors, peers, and customers.

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