

## BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP

by Rex C. Houze

Have you noticed that most people think they are better communicators than they really are? As a result, deadlines are missed, productivity suffers, mistakes are made, feelings get hurt, tempers flare, customers leave, and profits sag.

With more messages than ever before flying at us from all directions, even being a good communicator isn't good enough these days. The gap between being a good communicator and being a great communicator can be huge. How would your business and life be better if you and everyone you interacted with improved their communication from good to great?

Effective communication is more than keeping people informed; it requires that people respond to your ideas, direction, and leadership. People respond to us by how we look (our demeanor and expression more than our physical appearance), how we act, what we say, and how we say it. The good news is we have total control over how we look, how we act, what we say, and how we say it. That means we have total control over our side of any communication. Since people respond to these four factors, and we have total control over them, the better we communicate the better chance we have of getting people to respond to our ideas, direction, and leadership. Listed below are seven ways you can improve your communication ability:

1. **Choose your words and phrasing carefully (what you say).** Words are powerful. They can build up or tear down; encourage or discourage; clarify or confuse; motivate or de-motivate. Choose simple, easy to understand words that clarify, build up, encourage and motivate. Instead of "should have" (judgmental), say "next time;" instead of "have to" (parental) say, "get to" or "it's important...;" instead of "always" or "never" use specific occurrences. Phrases such as "I believe in you," "I appreciate you," "tell me about it," and "thank you" are powerful and get people to respond to you in a positive manner.
2. **Choose tone and inflection carefully (how you say it).** "WHAT.... WERE... YOU... THINKING!?" will illicit a different response than "What happened?" or "Tell me about it." Tone and inflection can help you emphasize key points. Improper use can also trigger negative emotions. People will remember how you made them feel (positive or negative) long after they forget the words you used.
3. **Choose facial expressions and body language that are congruent with your message (how you look and how you act).** People will put credence in what they see over what they hear. Make eye contact. Stay in the moment (avoid looking at your watch, checking your pda, or otherwise disrespecting the other person). Avoid posture or gestures that might indicate you'd rather be somewhere else.
4. **Choose to listen purposely and actively with your eyes as well as your ears.** Eliminate or reduce distractions, take notes, ask questions, paraphrase for understanding, and do anything else to insure you fully understand what the other person is saying, needs, and means. Listen to word choice, phrasing, and what the person is **not** saying as well as what he or she is saying. Your eyes can help by reading facial expressions and body language. My granddaughter (who is three) can read facial expressions and body language – and she's never attended a body language course. If she can do it, you can too.
5. **Choose to communicate with integrity.** I believe the truth will find you out and if you haven't been truthful your credibility will be damaged. Besides, it is easier to tell the truth because you don't have to remember what you said. When you communicate with integrity, you will feel better about yourself and be more effective in every area of your business and life.
6. **Choose to be a positive, enthusiastic communicator.** Positive, enthusiastic people attract people and negative, dull people have a tendency to repel people. Choose to be the former.
7. **Choose to ask better questions to get better answers.** When you are clear on your goal for a given communication, situation, or person, you will have a tendency to ask better questions and get better answers. Plan your questions in advance and/or have an arsenal of questions that you've found to be effective in given situations.