

Five Communications Skills You Never Learned in College

By Davide Vettrains

You can read all the books in the world, but, to be a great communicator you need the right mindset. I began my career as a mechanical engineer in manufacturing and have spent the majority of my working life in operations. I've become adept at building high performance teams and through the process I've learned some skills that may benefit you as well. See which of these resonates with you.

Slow down and take time to listen.

I get frequent calls asking how to better communicate with clients and employees and other team members. More often than not, people are asking for quick fixes. They don't understand that relationships take time. To be a good communicator, stop and listen. Communication is more about serving the needs of the other person than about being heard. Talk less, listen more and hold onto the key points that people share.

Let relationships build organically.

When I meet a business associate, he or she typically falls into one of four categories: employee, client, influencer, or authority. Each serves a different role in my ongoing work life. To gain the most value from these relationships, I use the initial meetings to focus on discovery. I see these moments as good listening opportunities; I look for answers to basic questions: What makes them tick? What do they value? What do they need and how can I help? What win-win benefit can we work toward achieving? When the focus moves from you to them, you build trust and earn respect.

Life isn't lived from 8 to 5.

If you want the most from your business relationships, embrace the opportunity to be there when you're needed. When the phone rings, answer it; when an email from a valued associate arrives, respond to it. I'm not suggesting that you give up your personal time; just use discretion and be cognizant of what you can

do to serve and be helpful. Know that being available whenever you're needed is an avenue to build trust, no matter the time of day or day of the week.

People speak with their whole selves.

Words are great, but so are gestures, postures, movements, inflections and even silence. It's important to be able to read people; you can only push so hard when trying to establish a meaningful relationship. We have to be careful to use all our senses and skills to understand each person on a variety of levels. In our culture, we generally spend too much time talking and not enough time observing. Sometimes, no amount of words can have as much meaning as a moment of reflection and quiet.

Admit it. You're not perfect.

Did you ever miss a deadline? Forget a meeting? Get an email out the door without that final proof? Did you ever ask a silly question? Laugh at the wrong moment? Interrupt when someone was speaking?

Of course you have. We all have. The important thing is to be open and honest: be real. Fess up to errors in behavior or judgment. People will respect you for it, which can lead to building trust. Trying to cover up always leads to some new problem. Your transparency gives permission to others to be transparent with you.

How can we all be successful? By leaning on each other. Be truthful with yourself regarding the value you personally bring to the table; then let those around you bring their skills and gifts to bear so that the sum is greater than the parts.

Don't over-reach your boundaries; when the pressure is put on us to serve a client or a company, we have to be careful that we understand the relationships and opportunities at hand. We need to know when to jump



in and when to back off. Everyone can't be an expert at everything. Identify your strongest skills and any time you can't add value to a situation, be true to yourself and your team and back off.

At the end of the day, help others do what they cannot do. They will always appreciate it when you help them achieve more and lead them to success; but also have trust and the courage to allow those around you to handle situations in their own way. You will find that communication will grow and mutual appreciation and success will follow.

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