

From Their Mouths to Our Ears: Learning How to Communicate Effectively

By Nick Arnette

Have you ever had a really really long argument with someone only to walk away and feel like they never heard you? Well, if you remember from the first section of this book, you can't control someone else's response. What you can do is learn good communication skills, increasing your chances of making difficult discussions go more smoothly in the future. By the way, I've never had a really really long argument, I was just using that as an example. Or, if I did, I don't remember hearing any of it!

So, what does it take to have effective communication skills? Let's study nuts and bolts of it.

- * Maintain eye contact. Between 80 and 90 percent of all information absorbed by our brain is visual.¹⁰
- * When listening, repeat in your mind what the other person is saying. It helps keep your mind from wandering and helps you avoid that deer-in-the-headlights look when they ask you a question. □10. Eric Jensen, *Brain-Based Learning: The New Paradigm of Teaching*, Corwin Press, 2008, p. 55.
- * Be sure the other person is finished talking. Interrupting says, "What you're saying is not important. Shut up and listen to me."
- * If you think you may be interrupting, say, "Were you finished with your thought?"
- * Provide and ask for feedback. "What I heard you say was..." or, "I want to be sure I heard you correctly..." It instills camaraderie.
- * "SILENT" and "LISTEN" contain the same letters. Coincidence? I don't think so. When you take time to listen, you convey the message, "I care, and you matter."
- * Be alert for non-verbal messages such as body language and tone of voice. If a person is turning away from you or his or her voice is drifting off, that means it's time to wrap things up. Which brings me to my next point...

* Don't talk too much! Nothing is more annoying than someone who talks incessantly, mainly because they are only talking about themselves. Teamwork is impossible with one-way communication. If you're trying to sell something and you're doing all the talking, you're not selling anything. Never forget, "A fool is known by his multitude of words. "You'll learn a lot more from listening than talking. □(Quick self-test: If you continually find that people with whom you are eating are already done with their meals and you haven't even tasted yours, you're probably talking too much...or you know some exceptionally good listeners...or you only dine with really fast eaters!)

* Talk face to face as much as possible. It's easier to hear and understand when you see a person's facial expressions and can read their lips. I have a lot of friends who speak English as their second language. When I'm with them face to face we communicate well, but on the phone we can barely understand each other. If at all possible, have important discussions in person, or try a visual medium such as Skype.

Pickin' a Mission

Okay, so now we've talked a little bit about how teams work. We've also thought about ways we can all communicate a little better, making it easier to put good teamwork □into action. But what use is a team that doesn't know what it's supposed to do or where it's supposed to go? If you set out on a journey with no destination in mind, you will soon find yourself lost.

The best place to start is with a mis□sion statement. You can call it a goal, a □slogan, or a motto. It just needs to state □what you want to convey and accomplish. For our purposes, I'll refer to it as a mission statement.

Your mission should be clear and concise. There may be one overall mission statement for your business, such as, "Our company's mission is to provide quality products at afford- able prices." Each department (sub-team) in turn would have its own mission statement, such as, "The goal of the Customer Service Department is to provide excellent service by treating our customers like family." You might even want to have mini mission statements for your meetings, such as, "The goal of today's meeting is to choose a theme for our next event." The same idea works for your home, volunteer, or other activities. For example, a home mission statement could be, "Our family goal is to have quality family time."

Once you know your mission, you can discuss with your team how to achieve it. The family whose goal is quality time might agree to turn off the TV for an hour a night to do an activity of some kind together. Or, if you're super busy, it could be that you'll all eat dinner together with no interruptions or distractions at least once a week. It's your team, and it's your mission. Define it.

The sky is the limit when it comes to mission statements. The most important things are that it's clearly defined and that everyone on the team knows what it is. It's surprising to me that most people don't know their organization's mission statement. If you don't know where you're going on your mission, how are you ever going to get there? In addition to that, if you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you're there?

On the other hand, if you do know what your mission is, be it long-term or short-term, everything you do can be influenced by it—because you're on a mission!

When I was in first grade, my entire family went to Stapleton International Airport to see President Lyndon B. Johnson. Our mission was to see him and shake his hand.

We were on the tarmac waiting behind a thin rope as Air Force One pulled up near us. It seemed like hours, but finally, there he was, L.B.J. in all his presidential splendor. The president started going down the long line of people, shaking hands as he went. When he came near me, I was ecstatic. I was going to get to shake hands with the president! Well, he just passed right over my little first-grade hand. As a matter of fact, he didn't shake anyone's hand in my family, except for my mom's.

We were more than disappointed. My dad saw the disappointment on our young faces. My mom came up with a brilliant idea. She said, "Hey, I just shook the president's hand. So if I shake your hand, it will be just like shaking his hand." We all bought into it. Even my dad, although he might deny it! We all went home feeling like we'd accomplished our mission, thanks to my mom being a team player.

Sometimes accomplishing a mission requires a little flexibility, a little sensitivity, and a little imagination.

Take a little time to write a few mission statements for your life. The best way to get somewhere is to know where you want to go.

1. My mission at work:

2. My mission at home:

3. My volunteer/civic/spiritual mission(s):

The preceding article is an excerpt from *Me, We and Glee: How to have a great attitude, work as a team and keep your sense of humor*, by Nick Arnette. Known as *The Feel Good Funny Guy*, Arnette is a popular keynote speaker at business meetings throughout the United States and Canada. You can contact Nick Arnette at www.NickArnette.com, email: nick@nickarnette.com

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