

Take Charge of Your Destiny

By Susan Hodinko

Success in the workplace, whether as a business owner or an employee, is largely determined by how others perceive us. More than our knowledge and skills, it is our communication style that has the greatest impact on how we are perceived.

This, in turn, determines how well we succeed in virtually every aspect of business, from providing leadership, working with fellow employees, closing sales, building relationships, being efficient and much more.

How well we succeed is largely determined by how others perceive you, then who has control over your destiny? The answer is - you do. Take charge of your destiny by evaluating and enhancing your communication style. By communicating effectively, you will inspire others to respect, value, appreciate and have confidence in you.

For business owners, effective communication skills lead directly to such critical business needs as increasing sales, gaining new clients, retaining employees, developing your employees to their fullest potential and creating a well-functioning business entity. For employees, effective communication skills improve efficiency, foster recognition and promotion opportunities, and enhance working relationships with co-workers.

Let's examine a typical



business scenario: A challenging business issue has been identified and you are being asked to suggest a potential solution. How do you respond? Here are some effective communication strategies:

• **Start with the bottom line.** State your thought clearly, right up front, and provide only one or two supporting points. Then invite the listener to respond. This keeps the discussion focused, sends a value message to others and fosters a cooperative, collaborative exchange.

• **Pause frequently to allow the listener to participate.** This encourages balanced communication, fosters synergy and communicates respect for others.

• **Smile.** This generates positive, receptive feelings in others.

• **Use "we" instead of "I."** This encourages teamwork, collaboration and synergy.

• **Offer options and suggest that the pros and cons of these be explored together.** This communicates that you are open and flexible, value the opinions of others and welcome a collaborative process. This also often creates the opportunity to discover a solution that might otherwise never have been thought of.

• **Ask effective questions.** Queries such as, "What other solutions can we come up with?" "How might we

improve upon —?" "What else do we need to consider?" and "What is the most important thing we are trying to achieve?" are helpful in reaching an end result that is satisfactory to all concerned because they seek clarity, elaboration and enhancement, leading to increased depth, breadth and quality of the exchange. Effective questions bring balance to the conversation, foster energy, synergy and brainstorming and often lead to new ideas.

Here are some communication styles to avoid:

• **Building to your point without stating it up front.** This usually causes stress and frustration in the listener, who struggles to figure out where you are going with all of this. In addition, since the listener has no point of reference, retention of what you have said is minimal.

• **Over-substantiating your point with a multitude of justifications or elaborations.** This often causes the listener to feel irritated, annoyed, defensive, devalued and dominated.

• **Running one sentence into the next, thereby prohibiting the listener from "breaking in" or engaging in a two-way conversation.** This causes the listener to feel frustrated, irritated, impatient and often causes the listener to "tune out."

• **Jumping from one thought or example to another to substantiate your point.** This

often takes you further and further off-point and confuses the listener.

We all use a variety of communication styles in different situations. What is important is to determine what your predominant style is, and then to ask what steps you can take to enhance your communication skills.

Ask those you trust and are comfortable with to give you feedback. Work on being conscious of how you are communicating. Write down your observations, and set goals for improvement. Enlist the aid of a conversation buddy - someone you feel comfortable with that can give you ongoing pointers.

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