

Communication is Everyone's Job

By **Anthony Schmid**, *CPS Engineer, Corporate Project Services, Wenger Manufacturing, Inc.*

When was the last time you did a performance appraisal on your job as a communicator?

Chances are that's never happened, as communication is not a common individual performance metric in our industry.

Manufacturing companies focus on metrics that improve production efficiencies and ensure production lines are running at peak performance. We measure performance on technical skills, customer satisfaction, changeover rates, capacity utilization, and even health and safety incidents. We talk about Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tied to quality, production volume, efficiency, compliance and maintenance. But communication effectiveness—it's not as common to attach metrics to that.

Our primary focus at Corporate Project Services is to create solutions for clients, and we do put an emphasis on solid communication. We recognize communication is how we identify and implement solutions in the best way possible—

starting by listening carefully to the client's needs, followed by clearly articulating a plan for meeting their goals, and finally with keeping open lines of communication to keep projects

moving forward smoothly and with minimal disruption.

In the workplace and in life, everything we do can be strengthened or destroyed by communication. Every conversation, every email, every phone call, the vibe we send while in meetings, how we listen and respond to others—the way we communicate matters.

Honing Your Communication Skills

You can be the brightest and most experienced manager, but if you're a poor communicator, the value you bring to the team may never even be realized.

When communication is good, there's no confusion. Everyone is on the same page. It

enables the team to function and work cohesively as a collaborative unit. When communication is poor, there is uncertainty, broken down processes, inefficiency and in the worst cases, utter chaos.



You can find endless amounts of books written on the topic—trust me, I've read many of them. Through the insight gleaned from those resources and my own experiences, I've picked

up on a few key learnings that I believe can make each of us a stronger communicator:

Be clear about “what, who and when,” but even more importantly, “how” and “why.”

Covering all these bases is your best bet at avoiding mutual mystification, which just puts everything at a standstill. When those details are excluded, people easily jump to the wrong conclusions. It can make you look foolish and stir up unnecessary negativity.

Saying “no” is hard; nobody likes bad news, but it’s amazing how explaining the “how” and the “why” of the situation can make things easier to accept. This is especially true when changes need to occur. Perhaps there are new expectations for a process that’s been followed for 40 years—communicating the reasons WHY that change is better for the business and being crystal clear about the steps involved (the HOW) can mean the difference between quick adoption of the new process and resistance to it.

Take time to do it well.

If you don’t know how to answer a question, or just need more time to think through the right response, it’s ok to respond with, “let me get back to you.” It’s more important to the process—and to avoid confusion and conflict—that you organize your thoughts so you can articulate them clearly than to respond immediately. It’s that knee-jerk reaction that often causes frustration and misinterpretations.

If you’re writing, take time to write well; or if it’s a verbal exchange, plan your messages before responding. You may even want to bounce it off of a colleague before responding to make sure your point is coming across clearly.

Remember simplicity is key.

When delivering a message, no matter what kind of channel you’re using, it’s important to

cover who, what, when, where, how and why, as mentioned above, but that doesn’t mean it you have to be long-winded and complex. If you’re presenting, writing an email, or engaging in a conversation, edit what you’re needing to say and do it in as few words as possible. Sometimes one sentence is all it takes.

Own the process.

I love this quote from John Maxwell: “The great problem with communication is the illusion that it happened.”

We’ve all had those experiences when we get an ambiguous response to a question, leaving us unsure of its meaning. That can result in becoming stuck and unsure of the next move; or it can be taken the wrong way completely and create further issues. This is especially challenging with email because you don’t get the clues from body language and facial expressions...and those speak volumes.

When confusion occurs, whether you’re on the receiving end or you’re the one delivering the message, you have the power to clear the air. Take responsibility for making sure all parties understand. If you sense breakdowns occurring, intervene to get everyone on the same page. Ask questions and clarify what needs to be clarified. Ask, “Did what I explain make sense?” and, “What questions do you have for me?”

Say something.

In the absence of information, people tend to create their own story. I once visited with a vendor to learn more about equipment firsthand; but after the initial contact, communication between us lapsed. This was a good lesson for me on the importance of dropping some kind of communication, even if it’s just a quick email acknowledging a status of “still working on it.” Without any updates, it makes you wonder and speculate and forces you to draw your own conclusions.

How would you rate your effectiveness as a communicator?

I would argue that for any role in any part of the organization, communication skills are a KPI that needs to be evaluated, developed and continuously improved. What's hard about measuring communication effectiveness though is that it's difficult to quantify and is very subjective. It's hard to attach metrics to it and collect data.

In the least, improving communication should be part of your professional development plan, whether that's accomplished through books or seminars, or seeking out a mentor—identify someone in your company who you think has excellent communication skills and learn from him or her.

Bottomline, even if it's not in your official job description, communication IS part of your job.

It takes effort, and even when others don't step up to the role, you can own it and set the example for how to do it the right way.

Does your team measure communication effectiveness? How have you repaired communication breakdowns? Share your ideas with us on LinkedIn! You can also [reach out to our team](#) if you have questions for CPS.

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