



It's All About Communication

You arrive for work bright and early, ready for a productive day. No sooner have you entered the building than you're accosted by an employee who has a complaint. "Well," she demands, "what are you going to do about it?" You promise to get back to her later in the day.

You head down the hall toward your office. An employee greets you cheerfully. Another glares and grumbles. "I've got to talk to him about that attitude," you think.

Stopping by the break room for coffee, you notice a few of your staff seated around a table in the corner. "What's up?" you ask pleasantly, meaning to strike up a friendly conversation. "Nothing," one of them mumbles. You surmise something is up, considering how their conversation stopped abruptly when you entered the room.

At your desk, you power on the computer to check your e-mail. The usual: 37 messages and it's only 8:15. You'll attend to them later. First, you need to check with the human resources department about getting the new hire through orientation.

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As soon as you pick up the phone to call human resources, your boss appears. “Need you in a meeting at 9 about the Jones account. It’ll only take fifteen minutes.” You know better. These “only” meetings go on longer than that.

With less than 45 minutes until the meeting, you do a quick mental calculation. Should you jot down notes for your presentation to the staff tomorrow? Meet with Jane to give her instructions on the next project phase? Call Joe in to talk about that attitude problem you’ve noticed? Get together with the manager of quality control about those defects in the gizmos? Review the Jones file? Check on that employee’s complaint? Reply to the e-mails, voice mails, memos, letters, faxes, ad infinitum? Brrriing ... your telephone rings. Saved by the bell.

Nobody told you it would be like this!

What You Do

Call to mind a typical week at work. Of the activities listed below, place a checkmark next to those you do on a regular basis. Estimate, on average, the percentage of time you spend on each.

_____	Work on tasks or projects	_____%
_____	Discussions with the boss	_____%
_____	Conversations with peers	_____%
_____	Discussions with employees	_____%
_____	Give employees instructions	_____%
_____	Give employees feedback	_____%
_____	Interview	_____%
_____	Lead or take part in meetings	_____%
_____	Make presentations	_____%
_____	Compose memos, letters, e-mail	_____%
_____	Telephone calls	_____%
_____	Other activities	_____%

All of these activities involve *communicating* in one form or another. Chances are, you spend the bulk of your time involved in such activities. No matter what your “official” title—team leader,

supervisor, manager, director, business owner, or the like—if you manage people, communication is a critical part of what you do.

A Model of Management

Suppose you signed up for a course entitled *Management 101*. During the first session, the instructor poses this question to the class: “What is management?” How would you answer the question?

Figure 1-1 suggests some answers to this question.

The Experts Agree

Zig Ziglar has long been a popular author and speaker on leadership and motivation. In *Top Performance*, he cites research that shows 85% of your success depends on relational skills: how well you know people and interact with them. In the record-breaking bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey asserted, “Communication is the most important skill in life.” Thomas Faranda echoed the point in *Uncommon Sense: Leadership Principles to Grow Your Business Profitably*: “Nothing is more important to a leader than effective communication skills.”


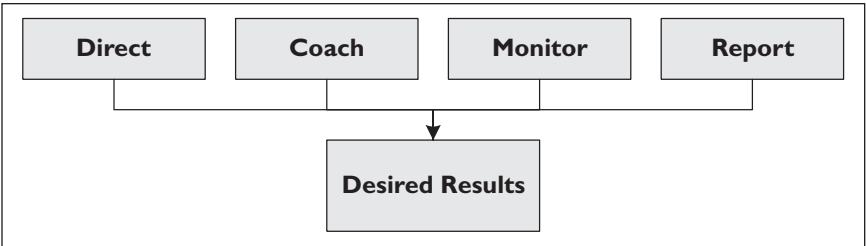



Figure 1-1. What does a manager do?

After decisions are made about the results to be accomplished in the area you manage, you direct and coach employee performance toward achieving those desired results. You then monitor what’s going on and report on progress or problems.

At every stage, you *communicate*. You interact with the boss, with employees, and with other departments. You may interface with entities outside of the organization, including suppliers, contractors, and government or community agencies.

At every stage, you encounter this challenge. You’re accountable for seeing that results are achieved. But you don’t

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produce them directly yourself. The results are produced by others (unless you're a "working supervisor" doing the jobs of both employee and manager). In other words, you're in the middle of it all (Figure 1-2):

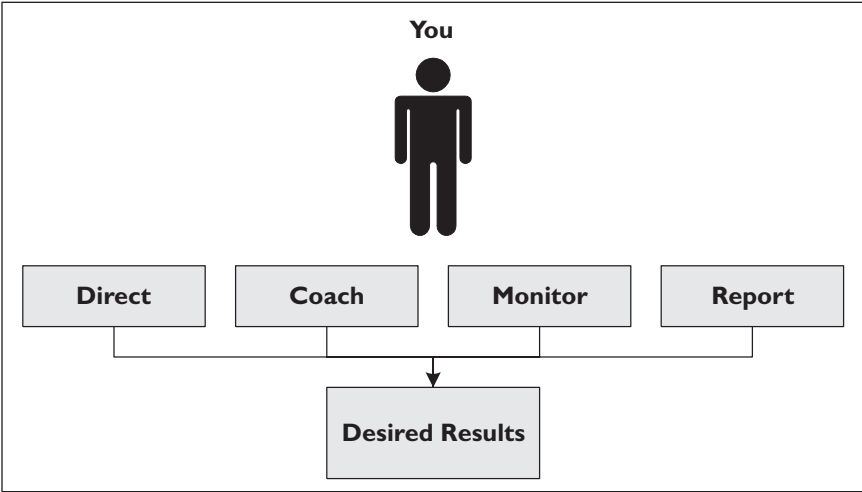
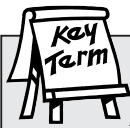


Figure 1-2. You as the manager



Management The process of producing results through other people.

For many managers, this realization requires a shift in mind-set and skills.

A Shift in Mindset and Skills

Think about the job you did before you were promoted to your first management position. What was your primary concern? Unless you were the office gossip, you were most concerned with your job. You concentrated your efforts on what you did.

What was the nature of the work you did? In all likelihood, it was mainly task-oriented. You did work of a technical or operational nature.

But when you occupy a management role, your frame of reference changes. Management requires a different mindset and skills.


The Managerial Mindset

As a manager, your primary focus is no longer on *you*. A manager's mindset shifts to *them* (or, perhaps more appropriately, *us*), the employees who do the tasks. Although you're still concerned with yourself in terms of doing your job well, you recognize your success depends in large part on how well you and your employees work together to accomplish goals. You concentrate on doing the things that will equip and encourage them to produce the desired results—and many of those things you do involve communication.

Management Skill

As a worker, you probably prided yourself on your technical or operational skills. It's likely one of the reasons you were promoted to management. You performed the tasks better than other employees.

Now, you don't do those same tasks anymore. You oversee the performance of others who do them. Your effectiveness as a manager isn't determined by your expertise with tasks or technicalities. Your effectiveness resides in your *relational* skills.



Relational skills Skills that build and maintain relationships. They pertain to how well you read people and relate to them. Relational skills include the abilities to establish rapport, instill trust, foster cooperation, form alliances, persuade, mediate conflict, and communicate clearly and constructively.

To be effective, you need to be a skillful communicator. You need to be especially skilled at *interpersonal* communications.

The Importance of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal skills are increasingly critical because of four factors of growing importance in most organizations these days: technology, time intensity, diversity, and liability.



Interpersonal communication Person-to-person and (with the exception of telephone and e-mail messages) face-to-face conversation. The prefix *inter* means *among* or *between*, so interpersonal is not one-way communication. It's an exchange that occurs through dialogue between two people or through discussion among several, with participation by everyone involved.

Technology

Review what you do. How much of your workday is spent interacting with people face-to-face compared with interacting with technology? How do you think employees would answer the question?

In an edition of a respected dictionary dated

1987, the word “e-mail” doesn’t appear. Now, e-mail is commonplace. So is voice-mail. Every year, the ranks of telecommuters grow. Technology has transformed the workplace, and its influence and impact are growing.

As early as 1982, social forecaster John Naisbitt cautioned in *Megatrends* (1982, p. 39), “Whenever new technology is introduced into society, there must be a counter-balancing human response—that is, *high touch*.” When you skillfully interact person-to-person, you bring to an increasingly high-tech workplace the necessary high-touch. (That’s a key theme in Chapter 9, “E-Communications.”)

Time Intensity

The workplace is hurried. ASAP isn’t soon enough. You need it NOW! (Or better yet, yesterday.) Rarely are documents sent by so-called “snail-mail.” They’re transmitted electronically in nanoseconds or expressed for overnight delivery. Like many other people, you’ve probably learned the modern method for getting more done in less time: multi-tasking.

You’re pressed for time. But Joe has a problem he has to talk to you about. The clock is ticking. But Jane doesn’t know the next step to take on that project until she gets further direction from you. In a rush, you “cut to the chase”—get right to the point—no time for idle chitchat. And Paul in human resources perceives you’re rude. What about the employee who comes to

you with a valid concern? You may miss it if you're multi-tasking because multi-tasking diverts your attention.

When time is at a premium, you can't afford to waste time through incomplete, inaccurate, or ineffective communication. Good interpersonal skills enable you to make the best use of the time you spend interacting with people.

Diversity

What is the population of your organization like? If it's like most, it's diverse. Age, ethnic, and gender diversity are commonplace. In addition to obvious differences, there are less obvious ones, like political preferences, religious beliefs, and lifestyle.

Jane asks for a day off to celebrate Kwanza. Joe is offended by off-color jokes. Paul winces when you greet him with "Hey, dude!" Arturo is free to work late every night. Dave is a single parent who needs to get home to his kids.

And you? To be fully effective, you need to be attuned to the various needs, interests, priorities, and communication styles of employees, peers, and the boss. You need to be adept at drawing upon the respective talents of a diverse work group. To do that, you need to interact—interpersonally. (This is so important that we get into it right away, in the first two chapters, devoted to perceptions, profiles, and preferences.)

Liability

In recent years, organizations have been sued by employees for every conceivable reason. Some legal actions have merit. Others should never go as far as they do. Many issues could be resolved when they first surface at the departmental level—if the manager knows what's going on and steps up to it.

You need to "keep your ear to the ground," so to speak. You want to build with employees relationships that encourage them to first bring their concerns to you. When employees have a grievance, take the time and show a willingness to hear them out. Use your interpersonal skills to help resolve issues before they get out of hand.



Handle with Care

Never appear to take lightly what someone else takes seriously. You may think a concern an employee expresses is “no big deal.” But if it’s important to him or her, respond as though it’s important to you. If you don’t, it’ll become important to you when you have to deal with the backlash that may occur.

If you laugh off or make light of a matter someone considers serious, you risk offending that person. They’ll feel you don’t take *them* seriously.

You can minimize the likelihood of unwarranted legal action. How? Foster an atmosphere of open communication. Without it, employees conclude their ideas don’t matter and their concerns are of no concern to you. They may think an issue management should address is being ignored. Resentments brew.

Address interpersonal conflicts early on. If you don’t, one of two things will happen. The conflict will escalate or it’ll be repressed. If it’s repressed, it will recur. You can bet on it.

Unresolved concerns and ongoing conflicts foment an environment rife with resentments and hostilities. As a result, it’s ripe for litigation. A dis-

contented and disgruntled employee will sometimes look for an excuse to sue.



Liability Issues

Pay particular attention and respond immediately to any issues of potential liability. These would include age, ethnic, or gender bias, harassment, health or safety hazards in the workplace, or threats.

The combined effects of these four factors—technology, time intensity, diversity, and liability—make strong interpersonal

skills a “must.” So do the characteristics of contemporary organizations.

Interactions in a Contemporary Organization

You can see at a glance some of the obvious differences between contemporary and old-order organizations, two extremes on the management continuum.

A contemporary organization is flatter. Within it, interactions are more fluid. And it places a premium on feedback. More people report to any one manager, and there are fewer managers. Teams are common, and communication networks allow people to interact with each other quickly and easily. Let's look at some of the characteristics of the contemporary organization in more detail.

Flattened

In recent years, many organizations have dismantled the old hierarchical form. The multiple levels of a traditional structure have been reduced and replaced with self-managed teams or cross-functional work groups. The "chain of command" is neither as long nor as rigid. Some of the traditional formalities have dissolved, allowing interactions to occur on a more casual basis.

As a former manager in a highly hierarchical corporation, I can remember when you wouldn't think of addressing the CEO in any way other than "Mr. Karey" ("Sir" was implied by a deferential tone of voice). Now, it's not uncommon in some companies to wave at the CEO from across the room and, with a tone of good-friend familiarity, shout out, "Hi, Joan!"

Contemporary organization An organization that reflects current trends and applies up-to-date management principles and practices. It's the "new" form of organization, as opposed to the "old order" of things.



Know the Norms

Even in the most contemporary organizations, there's still such a thing as "corporate etiquette." There are protocols and courtesies all employees are expected to observe. Many organizations, for example, still frown on going over the boss's head. If you go over the boss's head, you do so at your own risk. Know the "unwritten rules" and norms of acceptable conduct where you work. And let your employees know what they are, too, so they don't inadvertently cross the line and commit a breach of etiquette.



Fluid

An old-order organization is like a skyscraper. Navigating through its many levels can be time-consuming and tedious, especially when you try to elevate an issue from the ground floor to the top.

In contrast, a contemporary organization is like a modern two-story building. You can move between sections with greater ease and speed. Since you don't have to wend your way through and wait for layers of approval, you can respond to situations more rapidly. Often, you have greater access to those "in the know."

You can interact more readily, not only within your own team or department, but across functional lines as well. A contemporary organization allows and even encourages the flow of informal communication between and among interdependent groups.

Because a contemporary form is more "open," you have more avenues for advancing your ideas and the ideas of employees on your team. You also gain greater visibility for yourself and for promotable personnel. Occasions that give you visibility, such as meetings and presentations with executives, are opportunities to showcase your relational skills. (We'll cover meetings in Chapter 7 and presentations in Chapter 8.)

Feedback

In an old-order organization, communication is often one-way. A manager "above" communicates "down" to employees. In a contemporary organization, the manager resides at the center of the team or work group and everyone works within the context of delivering products and services to customers.

Your communications radiate out to employees. They, in turn, convey their feedback to you (and to one another). And there is regular communication with customers as well.

Contemporary organizations strive to be "people-sensitive"—responsive to the needs of employees and customers. Interactions are dynamic. There's more give-and-take, with ideas and information freely exchanged.

Employees don't have to hunt high and low for a suggestion box. They know managers are receptive to hearing their

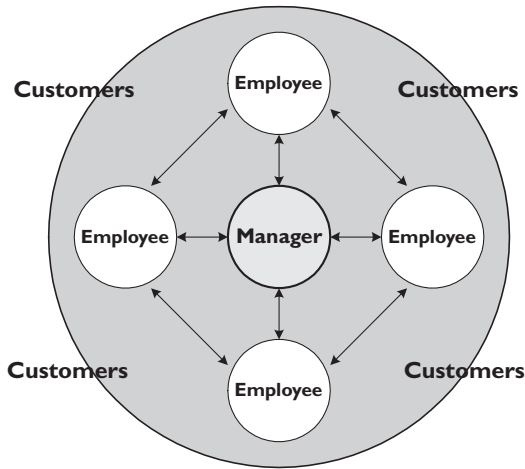



Figure 1-3. The contemporary approach to managing

suggestions firsthand. Asked for their input, employees feel valued. Managers find it easier to achieve “buy-in” because employees have had a say in decisions they’re asked to support.

In any type of organization, old or new or something in between, you get better results when you interact with people on a regular basis. When you do, keep your communications constructive.

**Bring the New
Into the Old**

If you work for an old-order organization, you can still put into practice contemporary management principles and interpersonal skills. At the very least, you can apply them within the area you manage. Your contemporary approach and relational skills will be like a breath of fresh air.



**Smart
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The ABCs of Constructive Communication

As the term implies, *constructive* communication builds up. It builds up employee morale. It builds teamwork. It builds positive relationships between people who then are not only willing, but eager to work in concert.



Out with the Old

Beware the *John Wayne style of management*, an approach often used in old-order organizations. It takes its name from those post-World War II movies in which John Wayne played the role of conquering hero.

Picture John Wayne standing on the bow of a battleship. He spots the enemy approaching. He commands the troops, “Fire!” What do they do? They obey.

Now picture John Wayne managing your department. He sees the need for action. He shouts a command. “Fire!” What do employees do? Nowadays, they might ask “Why?” “What’s in it for me?” “Do I get overtime pay?”

Shouting orders and expecting blind obedience is outdated and ineffective. Although military metaphors are still prevalent in business circles, managers act less and less like John Wayne commanding the troops. As a rule, you’ll get better results when you elicit cooperation rather than demand compliance. Remember, if you don’t like commands made of you, why would you do that to others?

One exception to the rule is in emergency or crisis situations. Then, the situation calls for a John Wayne type to take charge. The troops recognize the need to follow the leader’s directions. Brainstorming and decision-making by consensus are postponed until the crisis is over.

Destructive communication triggers conflict. It breeds dissension and divisiveness. It results in resistance and, on occasion, outright rebellion. It creates enemies rather than allies.

Booker T. Washington observed, “There are two ways of exerting one’s strength: one is pushing down, the other is pulling up.” The point sums up the contrast between destructive and constructive communication.

Whenever you interact with people—whether employees, colleagues, or the boss—you have essentially the same two ways to exert your influence. You can “push down” by putting people down. Or you can “pull up” by communicating constructively.

In the physical sense of exerting strength, pushing down is easier than pulling up. In the relational sense of exerting influence, putting down is also easier. Harsh criticism, sniping

remarks, and cutting people off are examples of communication that puts down.

It doesn't take skill to put people down. Anyone can do it. But the price is high, especially for a manager. Putting down demeans people, who are then disinclined to give you their best performance or support. They may be inclined to sabotage your efforts instead.

Pulling up through constructive communication takes skill. Sometimes it takes more time. But it reaps noticeably better responses and results. In the long run, it makes your job easier and interactions more pleasant. And you gain the added advantage of being seen as someone who can bring out the best in people. That's an asset if you want to advance in your career.


Throughout this book, you'll find skills and techniques for dealing constructively with specific situations. The ABCs described next apply *every* time you interact with someone. They are the fundamental principles of constructive communication. They form the foundation upon which productive relationships are built.

Approach

If you've flown in an airplane, you know the approach is critical to making a smooth landing. If a pilot attempted to land a plane without giving thought to the approach, trouble would certainly follow.

Have you ever experienced a troublesome interaction with an employee? with your boss? Part of the problem may have been with your approach. Communications proceed more smoothly and constructively when your approach is positive.

To approach a person in a positive manner, be pleasant and gracious. When appropriate, smile sincerely. A smile ranks high among likability factors and helps to put people at ease.



Approach The manner of addressing both a person and the subject. It's the preface to a communication, something that sets the stage. From a speaker's approach, a listener forms expectations of what's coming next.



Confidence An attribute of a positive approach and a trademark of skillful communicators. Confidence is synonymous with self-assurance. Confidence shores you up to remain calm and composed, even under pressure. When you convey confidence, people are more inclined to place their confidence in you.

Confidence is not arrogance. Arrogance is unwarranted conceit. It's evidence of an enlarged ego. When people are approached arrogantly, most react negatively.

If the subject isn't pleasant, such as when you're the bearer of bad news, consider the most positive quality you can project to the person under the circumstances. Some situations call for empathy or an expression of genuine concern. Other times, it's best to adopt a matter-of-fact manner.

To approach the subject in a positive manner,

be well prepared. Know what you're going to say. Early on in your message, allude to some benefit the listener stands to gain by hearing you out.

It's always positive when you approach a person respectfully, treat the subject reasonably, and convey confidence. Keep this in mind as you read this book: every technique works better with the right approach.

In later chapters, you'll find out more about positive approaches to specific situations and positive attributes to add to your communications. For now, store in your memory bank this "A" of the fundamental ABCs: *approach* in a positive manner to set the stage for a pleasant and productive interaction.

Build Bridges

Imagine you're about to undertake a project of building a bridge across a river. You're going to do this in partnership with someone you interact with frequently. It may be an employee, a peer, or your boss.

Picture yourself standing on one side of the river. They're standing on the opposite bank. It's been determined that the best way to build this bridge is if each of you works from your respective sides toward the center. The bridge will be complete when the halves are joined in the middle.

Refrain from Labeling

Labeling is a form of typecasting. A label is a “what” that can interfere with seeing “who” a person truly is. Labeling affects how you think about a person, which affects how you approach them and the communication that follows.

Suppose, for example, you’ve labeled Terry a “troublemaker.” When you approach Terry, what’s running through your mind? “Ugh, I’ve got to talk to the troublemaker.” Negative thinking like that is sure to show in your approach to Terry and throughout your interaction. How do you communicate with a “troublemaker”? Guardedly or aggressively. How will Terry react? Very likely like the “troublemaker” you’ve labeled Terry to be.

People tend to live up—or down—to your expectations. Critical, disparaging labels convey negative expectations and evoke behaviors on your part that quite naturally trigger negative reactions from others. If you must label people, give them positive labels, like Terry “the trooper.” And think it with a smile.



Now translate this hypothetical situation into what goes on when people interact. In conversations, discussions, meetings, or presentations, see yourself as being engaged in bridge building. The bridge you’re building is called *productive working relationship*.

That’s the aim of interpersonal communications: to build a relationship. Your ultimate goal is to have securely in place a relationship from which both people derive benefit. In a productive relationship between a manager and employee, the manager gains the benefits of the employee’s best efforts and input, such as creative ideas and suggestions for solving problems. The employee receives the benefits of the manager’s guidance, feedback that helps the employee improve their skills and performance, support for

Respect The quality of showing consideration and taking care to deal with people thoughtfully.

Respect does not require that you like someone personally. It doesn’t mean you have to agree with or even always understand them. It does require viewing a person as a fellow human being who has intrinsic value.





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Understanding and Cooperation

Do you and most of the people with whom you interact often understand and cooperate with one another? Or do you find that a lack of understanding and poor cooperation creates obstacles to performance and productivity?

As you progress through this book, pay particular attention to the interpersonal skills that will help you foster understanding and cooperation. By training and coaching, help your employees develop those skills so that they, too, can apply them in their interactions with you and with each other.

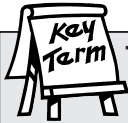
good ideas, motivation, and perhaps mentoring. Both receive from one another the benefit of being treated with respect.

Like building a bridge, building a relationship takes time, attention, and skill. It also often entails bridging differences. And sometimes you have to meet people halfway.

The middle of our metaphorical bridge represents points at which you and your bridge-building partner understand one another. It's when you say, "I see what you're getting at," and you really do. And if you don't understand, you try harder. Understanding one another, you're more willing to cooperate with one another.

When, for example, you understand employees' goals, you can cooperate with them to help them attain their goals. When they understand your concern about a problem, they can cooperate with you to get it solved.

Bridges hold up only if they're constructed on a firm foundation. The same is true of relationships. A cooperative, productive working relationship is based on a twofold foundation of trust and commonality.



Trust The firm belief that someone or something is reliable, that you can depend on them or it.

Trust is included as a key term because it's key to how effective you will be in your dealings with people. It's a vital component of constructive communications.

Trust

To trust, people must feel safe. They need to feel safe not only in the sense of their physical safety

and security, but in emotional and psychological ways as well.

Trust in organizations has eroded. The lack of trust can be attributed in part to more than a decade of downsizings and layoffs. Many employees feel they can no longer trust that they'll have a job from one year to the next. Lack of trust can be attributed in part to the experience of frequent change, which is often accompanied by uncertainty and insecurity.

For these reasons, it's important that you interact in trustworthy ways. Employees may not trust the organization, but you want them to trust *you*.

When people feel they can trust you, they're inclined to be honest with you in turn. They're more willing to give you their support. When you need employees to perform "above and beyond the call of duty," most will come through for you—if they trust you.

You develop trust when you show yourself to be trustworthy. Through your communication behaviors, you convey the unspoken message, "You're safe with me."

When you interact with people, preserve their self-esteem. Refrain from making potentially hurtful or demeaning remarks about anybody. Most people feel uneasy hearing such remarks, even if they aren't directed at them. They suspect the next remark might be. Such remarks also come across as personal attacks that put a person on guard. When someone feels the need to be guarded or defensive, it's a clear sign they don't trust.

When someone shares a confidence with you, keep it confidential. If they learn you disclosed their secret, they won't feel they can safely open up to you.

Take care that you don't punish people with the past. If an employee makes a mistake, confront the matter and get it corrected. Once you're satisfied the employee is on the right track concerning that matter, move on.

If they make a mistake a year later, don't harp on the "sins" of the past. Don't say things like "A year ago you goofed on the Jones account. Now you've made a mistake on the Smith project." Here's how the employee translates that statement in their mind: "What's wrong with you? Don't you ever learn?" If you



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Consistency Creates Trust

People come to trust what they can count on, what occurs consistently.

Try this exercise. Across the top of a sheet of paper, write: "I can be counted on to ..." List things you do consistently. Be honest! For example:

"... do what I say I'm going to do."

"... reprimand employees in front of their peers."

"... listen without interrupting."

"... tell people what I think they want to hear rather than the straight scoop."

"... go to bat for the people I manage."

"... take credit for other people's ideas."

Now, which of those consistent behaviors build trust? Which undermine trust?

What next? Borrow a line from an old song: "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative." Continue consistently doing the trust builders (and add to them). Work on improving any behaviors that undermine trust.

You might also find it useful to introduce this exercise to the employees you manage. If you do, be sure to present it with a positive approach.

punish a person with the past, they won't feel safe interacting with you now or in the future.

Commonality

It's a characteristic of human nature. We prefer dealing with people who are "like" us. It's easier to understand one another when we share some things in common: a common language, similar backgrounds, common interests. We'll cooperate more readily with those with whom we have things in common.

Considering the many differences that exist in diverse work groups, one of your challenges is to discover and develop commonalities.

Commonality unites people. Drawn together by what they share, people function more effectively as a team. Commonalities reduce conflict. When conflict does occur, a step to resolving it is to identify the interests and goals in common.

A method for bridging differences and building commonalities is to engage people in participative planning (the operative word being *participative*). Schedule several sessions over a period of time. You can lead the discussion yourself, bring in a professional facilitator, or delegate discussion leadership to a respected member of your staff who's a skillful communicator.

As you proceed, elicit input from everyone. Encourage exchange. Take care that no one monopolizes the discussion. The point is to get everyone involved and talking about what matters to them.

Start with a discussion of organizational and individual values. What do people believe is the right and ethical way for themselves and the organization to operate? Then develop a mission statement. What is the purpose of the organization? What group of customers does it serve and how will it maximize its ability to serve them? If your organization already has a mission statement, you might ask employees to translate it into one that applies specifically to the operations of your work group. Continue with a discussion that leads to agreement on the group's goals.

These discussions are intended to focus on finding things all of you in the work group have in common. In the future, when differences threaten to disrupt teamwork or productivity, you can redirect the group's attention to their shared values, mission, and goals.

Consider, creatively, activities you can schedule

A Case of Commonality



We'd worked in the same department for over a year. Our desks were adjacent to one another. Since our jobs took us out of the office frequently, we didn't have much occasion to interact during the day. The times we were both in the office, our conversations were brief. On the surface, it appeared we had little in common.

When the company scheduled a weekend "working retreat" for a planning session, we were assigned to be roommates. We arrived on a Friday night. By the time we left on Sunday afternoon, we'd discovered we had a lot in common. From then on, our working relationship was a model of mutual respect and collaboration.

or sponsor that will give employees opportunities to get to know one another—not as coworkers but as individuals. Ask for their ideas. Talk to colleagues to learn about things they’ve done. With your peers or boss, brainstorm ideas for bringing people together in situations through which they can discover their commonalities.

Customize Your Communication

Joe quickly gets to the “bottom line.” He thinks “small talk” is for small minds. He grows impatient in meetings. He cuts people off when they take too long to get to the point.

Paul is a friendly fellow. He pauses to make “small talk,” which he considers a way to build rapport with his coworkers and the boss. He listens intently in meetings, often asking questions so he has the complete picture. When relating information, he provides ample detail to make sure he’s presenting his points clearly and accurately.

Two different employees with very different modes of communicating. What’s yours? Are you more like Joe? More like Paul? Or maybe somewhere in between? How would you describe your manner of interacting with people? Here’s the skilled communicator’s answer: “I’m flexible.”

From the moment you (a) approach a person, and then (b) build a bridge of a productive relationship, you’ll experience greater success when you (c) customize your communications to suit the other person.

To customize something means making it specially for a customer. Think of the people you interact with as “customers” who do business with you. Your goal is to provide the highest level of customer satisfaction. When it comes to interpersonal communications, you customize by adapting your mode of communicating to the mode the customer prefers, the mode that works best.

Customizing your communication helps to build trust. It conveys a sense of commonality. But it’s not manipulative. It should just demonstrate a sensitivity to different styles of communication and personalities, such that communication is as open as

The Real Thing



Have you ever had an experience similar to this one? Two colleagues attend a seminar. In a conversation with them a day or so later, they use a phrase you've never heard them use before. They do something that strikes you as phony. You call them on it. "Where'd that come from?" "Oh," one of them answers, "I picked it up at that seminar."

Call to mind a person you consider an excellent communicator—and a model manager. What are some of the qualities they convey? Sincerity is probably one. A person I consider an outstanding communicator and an exceptional leader is often described as "the genuine article."

Learning new skills and techniques is commendable. It's a way to improve your performance, build better relationships, and advance in your career. But, in the process of trying new techniques, you don't want people thinking the techniques are "tricks." You don't want to come across as contrived, manipulative, or phony.

So practice the skills you learn here. Periodically review the chapters in this book you find most useful for you. Get together with a friend or colleague and role-play. Practice to the point of integrating the skills so they come easily and naturally to you.

possible to facilitate your mutual success. This style tends to make people more receptive to what you have to say. And, in most cases, it prompts from them a more favorable response.

How do you customize your communications? You'll find out in Chapter 3.

The Communicator's Checklist for Chapter 1

- Because communication is critical to what you do, it pays to hone your skills.
- In view of the nature of the workplace today, interpersonal skills are more important than ever before.
- Apply the ABCs of constructive communication whenever you interact with people. **A**pproach in a positive manner. **B**uild bridges of understanding and cooperation, based on trust and commonalities. **C**ustomize your communications to suit others.