



An Uncommon Approach to Workplace Communication
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Effective communication is one of the most valuable tools in the workplace. They are particularly important to have basic goals and messages clearly understood, questioned, and hopefully adopted. In this competitive and tight economic climate, effective communication is essential for all levels of employees so they can focus their energies in the right direction.

According to a study conducted by consulting firm Gatto Associates, LLC a Pittsburgh based consulting firm, 1,700 managers were assessed, and ninety-five percent of low-performing executives are unable to communicate effectively. The study found that for technical work skills, high- and low-performers were similar, but that there was a critical difference in communication skills, the latter being the number one correlate to success as a leader. The study noted that while executives are hired for their technical skills, when they are fired, it is almost always because they were unable to communicate.

We as psychologists can be of great help in training business people to effectively communicate ideas. We need to help our clients and ourselves by continuing to learn to: listen, challenge ideas appropriately, and collaborate through an effective communication process. Some suggestions for what we can teach are the same as for any good relationship, and some are unique to the business world.

Business psychologist Debra Conden provides strategies, as reported in an article by Christine Galea in [Sales and Marketing Management](#), February 2003:

- Focus on listening. Use comments like "I'm wondering where you are on this issue," so that the other person knows you are paying attention to his thoughts or expertise. In turn, he will be more open to hearing what you have to say.
- Ask for clarification. Making sure you have heard the other person correctly goes a long way towards keeping communication clear.
- Be brief. Deliver your message in as few words as possible.



- Don't repeat yourself. Even if you don't get an acknowledgement that someone agrees, don't try to drive your point home by repeating it in different ways.
- Periodically ask, "Am I making sense?" Asking for feedback as you speak lets others know that you are more interested in their opinion than in being right.

In researching workplace behaviors, we found that the development of a client's workplace communication skills is essential for success. One that we will focus on in this article is on Robert K. Greenleaf who developed the idea of Servant Leadership while an executive at AT&T. Robert K Greenleaf, while an executive at AT&T developed the ideas of servant leadership and the key to this approach lies in successful communication.

In our research we found many studies on workplace behaviors that communication is significantly correlated as a behavior with leadership. So let's follow the ideas of an executive with a proven track record to give advice on how to work with clients with communication issues. The beauty of Greenleaf's approach to the workplace is that it can also be utilized in the home place. As you read it you will think about humanistic psychologists like Maslow, Rogers and May, and you may reflect on how you teach (didactic approach) in your counseling sessions with clients, and how to help them with bibliotherapy and homework between sessions. Following Greenleaf's approach actually teaches that doing the right things, no matter the course of study, seems to lead to the same places.

In his works, Greenleaf discusses the need for a better approach to leadership, one that puts serving others--including employees, customers, and community--as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, the sharing of power in decision-making and most importantly effective communication and relationship building. Greenleaf's approach is a stark contrast to the behaviors of some business leaders currently in headlines - leaders who lack integrity.

Characteristics of the Servant-Leader



1 Listening. Coupled with regular periods of reflection, listening is essential to the growth of people: listen to understand what is said; how the person feels, and focus on follow up action

2 Empathy. One assumes the good intentions of coworkers and does not reject them as people, even if one finds it necessary to refuse to accept their behavior or performance. (Carl Rogers would be proud of this behavior).

3 Healing. One of the great strengths of people is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. In today's world resilience is very important.

4 Awareness. General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens one's understanding of issues involving ethics and values. We can communicate this through actions as well as words

5 Persuasion. Rather than positional authority in making decisions within an organization effective communicators influence getting buy-in and acceptance, and adopting followers.

6 Conceptualization. People seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities, be able to dream, and be capable of converting those ideas into relativity. Being able to articulate those thoughts to others can be motivational to help others to dream great thoughts.

7 Foresight. This characteristic enables people to understand lessons from the past, realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. Having people express those ideas may make them vulnerable but will also make them stronger.

8 Stewardship. Greenleaf 's was for executives, managers, and



employees to hold their businesses in trust for the greater good of society. This is reminiscent to the American Indian thought that we do not own the land; we received it from our forefather to preserve it for our grandchildren.

9 Commitment to the growth of people. We need to help our clients believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. The communication of growth and development can take place through the communication of the actions.

10 Building community. This awareness causes people to think beyond themselves and business to a larger good.

Greenleaf's ten characteristics can help your clients become more effective communicators as well as give them an approach to being a workplace leader. By working through these ten characteristics your clients can increase their communication awareness and skills.

Larry C. Spears. Leader to Leader Institute and Jossey-Bass 2004.

Gatto Developing the Profiling of U.S. Management based on the MBTI and other Assessments 2000

Questions

In his works, Greenleaf discusses the need for a better approach to leadership, which the point below is correct?

- A. Utilizing the benevolent authoritarian approach
- B. Serving others **(right answer)**
- C. Holding information for only a limited amount of time
- D. Presenting followers with continual feedback

Listening entails?

- A. Understanding the content of the message
- B. Expressing the unexpressed

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- C. Following up with actions based on what was said without questions
- D. Listen to understand what is said; how the person feels