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Effective communication in business

By Lee Hopkins

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Effective communication in business is not about creating the perfect PowerPoint presentation. It's not about writing the perfectly-pitched report. It's not even about assiduously alliterating .

Sometimes effectively communicating in business can hinge on something really simple-----the habits you bring to your interactions with others.

As we all know, we all have habitual behaviours that we carry around with us and use unconsciously. It could be the "um" you sandwich between every fourth word of your presentation. It could be the nervous 'fig-leaf' gestures of your hands. It could be your constant swaying and looking away from your audience, as if you should be somewhere else far more important right at that moment.

Whoever you are, whilst you may know your facts inside-out, whilst your work ethic is the standard by which others are measured, if you don't recognise and work on your personal presentation habits you might eventually destroy all that you have strived so hard to achieve.

Whatever your particular habit is, you can best find out what it is by two great methods:

* Ask your colleagues what you do in face-to-face encounters that annoys them

* Have someone video a presentation to a group that you give

We all have a communication habit that works against us in some small way. But the challenge we face is that, left unattended, they start adding up. The more you have, the more unprofessional you look.

Here's eight interpersonal communication blunders that can wreck your career over time:

* **Owning a weak handshake:** A weak handshake signals uncertainty, hesitation, a lack of integrity, a lack of confidence and a lack of courage. It quite possibly also triggers subconscious responses in the recipient that cause them to focus more and for longer on your handshake than on your message. To butcher Nike's slogan, "Just don't do it!"

* **Displaying a nervous giggle:** Just like a weak handshake, the nervous giggle, in the eyes and mind of your audience, turns you into a child. No one seriously does business with a child.

* **Over-using "I'm sorry":** A 'killer' for undermining your authority, a phrase like, "I need your report on my desk by 5 o'clock, sorry" just knocks your professionalism, your communication and your career for six. You have no need to apologise if you are the boss or the client. There is a place for politeness in business, as there are for courtesy and humility. But in the shark-eat-shark world of nature and business, there is no room for the weak and mousy. Sorry to have to break that to you...

* **Standing passively:** Crossed arms, crossed legs... they signal just one thing—u—detachment, as if you really don't want to be there, listening to the other person, but you have to. Passively standing kicks down the building bricks of trust, over time reducing your career reputation to rubble.

* **Avoiding eye contact:** Whilst too much staring at someone can cause discomfort, so can too little. By not looking at your audience (of one of one thousand) in the eye, you come across as nervous and insincere. A reasonable period of eye contact is between 4 and 7 seconds at a time, per person, especially when

you are talking to them.

* **Playing with your hands:** Wringing your hands, or playing 'fig leaf' is a sure way of conveying insecurity about yourself or your message. And recently I was reminded by my Toastmasters club colleagues of a habit of mine that I need to break—twisting my wedding ring around my finger when I present. My colleagues found themselves focusing more on my ring—twiddling than my message.

* **Speaking too softly:** A habit that is a sure sign in the eyes of others, that you are not confident about yourself, your message or your authority to deliver it. You come across as near-invisible, weak and insubstantial, as well as make yourself difficult to be heard by those who are hard of hearing. And as I get older, my hearing is definitely getting worse—u—a legacy of spending years in front of PA stacks as a lighting manager for

rock bands.

* **Using qualifying words:** This is quite possibly one of the worst habits anyone could have. Absolutely nearly everyone qualifies their words, and most often the effect is to dilute the power and impact of your message. Seriously, using words such as "kind of", "sort of" and "maybe" make even the smartest of us appear unsure.

When you match consumer psychology with effective communication styles you get a powerful combination. At Hopkins–Business– Communication–Training.com you can find the secrets to communication success. At Hopkins we show you how to communicate better for better business results.

Cross Cultural Communication needs...

By Neil Payne

Within the business context, cross cultural communication refers to interpersonal communication and interaction across different cultures. This has become an important issue in our age of globalisation and internationalisation. Effective cross cultural communication is concerned with overcoming cultural differences across nationality, religion, borders, culture and behaviour.

Cross cultural communication is critical to the business world. The diversity of people in cities and countries means an element of cross cultural communication will always be needed whether it is between staff, colleagues, customers or clients. Awareness of cultural differences can favourably

impact the success of a business. Improved staff interaction, better customer relations and effective client management are all areas that will reap benefits through cross cultural understanding.

Although cross cultural communication competency can only be truly achieved through cross cultural awareness training, language acquisition, foreign travel and cultural immersion there are some guidelines that can enhance your cross cultural communication skills.

Cross Cultural Communication needs ...Listening Skills

Although emphasis usually lies on being a competent speaker, listening is a key skill that many business personnel do not exercise enough. For cross cultural communication, attentive listening is critical to be able to understand meanings, read between the lines and enable to empathise with the speaker.

Cross Cultural Communication needs...Speaking Skills

Listening and speaking must work in tandem for effective cross cultural communication. Speaking well is not about accent, use of grammar and vocabulary or having the gift of the gab. Rather, cross cultural communication is enhanced through positive speech such as encouragement, affirmation, recognition and phrasing requests clearly or expressing opinions sensitively.

Cross Cultural Communication needs... Observation

Large amounts of cross cultural information can be read in people's dress, body language, interaction and behaviour. Be aware of differences with your own culture and try to understand the roots of behaviours. Asking questions expands your cross cultural knowledge.

Cross Cultural Communication needs... Patience

Man has been created differently and we need to recognise and understand that sometimes cross cultural differences are annoying and frustrating. In these situations patience is definitely a virtue. Through patience respect is won and cross cultural understanding is enhanced.

Cross Cultural Communication needs ...Flexibility

Flexibility, adaptability and open-mindedness are the route to successful cross cultural communication. Understanding, embracing and addressing cross cultural differences leads to the breaking of cultural barriers which results in better lines of communication, mutual trust and creative thinking.

Following these five cross cultural communication needs will allow for improved lines of communication, better cross cultural awareness and more successful cross cultural relationships.

Neil Payne is Director of London based cross cultural communication consultancy

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