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Key to Excellent Communication: Anticipation

By Susan Dunn

Key to Excellent Communication: Anticipation by Susan Dunn, MA Clinical Psychology

Excellent communication. It's what we're all after, when the first rule of communication is to assume you've been misunderstood.

We generally work very hard to express what we have in mind, and in giving instructions to go over each one step-by-step. We also try and listen carefully, and to repeat back what we think we've heard to be sure. And if we're selling, we try and anticipate objections. But there's one part that's very helpful we often leave out.

I learned it from my Dad, a great communicator, when I was a teenager. I didn't like to listen too closely, and often knew less than I thought I did. Like most teenagers. He was a gifted teacher, a patient and careful communicator, and convincing judges no doubt prepared him to convince teenage girls.

Now this will mean nothing to you if you haven't driven from a northern suburb into Chicago on Lake Shore Drive, but I hope you can think of something similar in your own experience.

As you make the drive, there are several turns and then one big swing toward the Lake. If you live there and are at all 'directional', you always know the Lake is on your left when you're going south and going into Chicago is south. Coming home, you keep the Lake on your right. The suburbs were laid out on a grid, long before planned communities, and it's one area where you can turn right, right, and right again and get back to where you started from. (When I moved to rural North Carolina and tried this, I ended up in another county!)

Now, on this particular occasion I was going to the ballpark for the first time, and my Dad was telling me how to get there. He carefully gave me the instructions, drawing me a map on a piece of paper, and said, "Now when you get to XXX, instead of turning left as you always do, you're going to go straight ahead."

Key to Excellent Communication: Anticipation

I said I got it and was ready to head out the door. Just before I did, he said, "Just remember: Resist all urges to turn left." I said "okay" and headed out.

When I got to the turn, I saw what he meant. Straight ahead looked like a dead end. If I was sure of anything, it was that I should go ahead and follow the hundreds of cars swinging left. Only my father's "resist all urges" kept me going straight ahead, and on to the ballpark.

And the fact he phrased it that way piqued my curiosity. "What's that?" I thought. So I remembered.

I also felt very close to him as the turn appeared. This is the sort of engagement you like to have with someone you're learning from or working with. I thought he was really something to have anticipated how I would be feeling.

TAKE HOME POINT: We are more likely to get someone's attention, to convince them, and to motivate them by engaging their emotions.

Saying "Do not turn left" puts the negative in your mind, raises resistance, and may be forgotten. Saying "turn right" may also be forgotten when needed, especially since he'd grown up there, driving that drive a thousand times, and obviously had done it himself. He had NOT resisted the urge to turn left, and knew all about it.

This is a small example with small consequences.

However, I've thought of this communication many times as I've given people instructions in how to do things and tried to get inside their head to figure out how best to convey the information. It's come in very handy. If the person doesn't get an "ah hah" at the moment, they tell you about it when they get back, and they are grateful, as I was.

Here are some examples that direct you to manage feelings, think it through, and respond, not react.

1. When someone says in a negotiation, "Your fees are way out of line," resist all urges to get defensive.
2. When you're telling a teenager something they need to do, resist all urges to get drawn into arguments over premises.
3. When you're "hijacked" (flooded with anger) resist all urges to say the first thing that comes into your mind. Stop and count to ten or take a timeout and come back to it.
4. When you're giving an event and it starts to unravel at the end, resist all urges to give up.
5. Whenever you're trying to solve a problem, resist all urges to think black and white. Most of the time there is more than one possible solution.
6. If you see the devil with a blue dress on ... j.k.

Key to Excellent Communication: Anticipation

These suggestions point the listener toward things likely to occur, in some cases almost certain to occur, and alerts them to feelings they should note but hold at bay in order to allow for correct action, sound judgment and wise decisions.

To put the icing on the cake, you can go on to the "And if" portion of instructions. In the first example, if I missed the turn, nothing happened except I'd get lost.

Another day I was heading into what's called The Loop, the major business district of Chicago, where he worked. Chicago has great public transportation and most people take the elevated train into the City (the "el"). I would catch the el just two blocks from our house and take it to the Loop. "Then," he said, "leave the station and turn right. If you turn left you will be in Skid Row and you don't want to be there."

"What's that?" I asked, instantly curious.

He was not referring to the band. What he was referring to was largely removed in Chicago with urban

renewal, but the USC site defines Los Angeles' Skid Row as "an extensive cluster of missions, shelters, drop-ins and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels, the largest service-dependent ghetto in the nation."

My father described it somewhat differently, and did not fail to make an impression on me.

I turned right.

This is akin to those helpful people who tell you in giving driving directions, "And if you get to a Jack-in-the-Box, you've gone too far."

It's always good communication to anticipate some of these things.

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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.

Key to Excellent Communication: Anticipation

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.

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Neil Payne is Director of London based cross cultural communication consultancy

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