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The Keys to Effective Communication

Success in every area of life is underpinned by the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

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Success in every area of life is underpinned by the ability to communicate clearly and effectively. Most of us have heard this many times. But what exactly does this mean. Communication is actually an intricate process and a while back a situation took place that reminded me of its complexities. My good friend and I were planning to attend a networking function at a local restaurant. We agreed to meet at a place called the Blue Martini, but to our dismay there was more than one location. My friend thought I was talking about the Blue Martini closer to his home, which was more than 30 minutes from where the function was being held. Needless to say that a minor miscommunication created a major mix up.

Another real life example involves the company that was building my website a few years ago. We agreed to block off an entire day to go over plans and begin building the site. Because it was a whole day, my designer needed to clear her day and then she was going to confirm with me. Well to make a long story short, we were both very busy and when she did not confirm, I assumed that she was too busy. I made my own plans so as not to spoil the day. She cleared her day, and told all of her other clients, except me. Obviously, we both contributed to the mistake, and fortunately it became a very good lesson in communicating clearly.

I could easily go on and on with examples, but I think you get the point, and I am sure that you have your own examples to draw from.

"It is difficult to accomplish something if you are not sure what it is!" Likewise it is difficult

to get others to do something if they don't know what they are trying to do.

As a life-coach, author and professional speaker, effective communication is the number 1 goal of everything I do. In fact, with my clients our first order of business is to make three things crystal clear; 1) decide exactly what they are going to accomplish, 2) determine how they can measure any progress they make, and 3) define how they will know when the goal has been achieved.

Remember, in all communication there is a sender, the message itself, the receiver and perhaps the most important and often left out part, the feedback; which is the confirmation that the message was received and understood. Communicating effectively demands that we understand the complex nature of this process and make a commitment to continue to improve our speaking and listening skills.

Communication snafus are commonplace and very frustrating when they happen, especially when important things are at stake. Unfortunately, life is complicated and we can't always avoid them. Likewise understanding the importance of effective communication is only part of the greater whole. So here are a few simple suggestions for becoming a better communicator.

1. Mean what you say and say what you mean…(but this does not give you permission to be mean.) So often people are unwilling to say what they truly feel in order to prevent hurt feelings. In business and in personal relationships, however, this tactic often backfires, and in a big way. Effective communication is important, and so is honesty, yet it is imperative that we learn to strike a balance between the two. Learning to be tactful and compassionate with others is something that takes time and practice. However, it is well worth the effort.

2. Write It Down... Anything written has far more value because it is no longer an intangible idea floating around in our head. Something powerful happens when things get written down on paper. For example, written goals are far more powerful than vague ideas. And at least for me, a written "to-do" list is far more likely to be completed. And when you have something difficult to say, perhaps one of those "crucial conversations" it often helps to write it down and practice what you want to say first. You

might even ask an objective individual to coach you on your ability to convey your message.

3. Paint A Picture Of What You Want…There is a saying that a picture says a thousand words. This is because we think in pictures, not words, so if we can paint a visual image of what we are trying to accomplish it is far easier to remember. A picture sends a clear message to our brain of what we are trying to accomplish. This is more about being clear with ourselves, however by being clear the better we can convey that idea to others. And there are several ways to do this. For example, lets say you are working on your "to-do" list. After you finished writing everything down, make a little picture of your list in your head. Even better, you can make a little movie of you completing everything you are trying to accomplish. These little techniques are quick to do and very powerful

4. Use Words And Ideas That Are Specific And Avoid Being Ambiguous…Far too often we use words that are unclear, ambiguous or have more than one meaning. While our message might be clear in our minds, making that message stick when sharing it with others is another story. Avoid words, like: try, more, less, and better, because they have different meanings to everyone.

> ***Communicate with words and ideas that clearly define exactly what you mean.***

For example, stating that you plan to increase sales by 20% by the end of the quarter is far more useful and effective than saying. "We need to bring in more revenue over the next few weeks."

5. State What You Want In Terms That Can Be Measured…This might sound obvious, but it is more challenging than it sounds. So often we develop a vocabulary that is filled with words like, "don't" and "can't." As a result we often speak about what we don't want to happen or what we can't do. As you begin to understand the importance of communicating effectively you will realize how ineffective this is. Always be clear about what you *want* to happen. For example, saying; "I want to arrive 5 minutes early" is something that can be measured, whereas "I don't want to be late" sounds like the same thing, but it can't be

measured. Likewise, stating that your ideal weight is 190 pounds is clearer than wanting to lose a few pounds.

6. Become A Better Listener… If there is one of the tips that I have listed that really stands out this is the one. Far too often we focus on what we say, when we should be listening and observing our audience to see how well they understand our message. As someone in the public speaking and professional presentations arena, listening is perhaps the most important, yet underutilized skill. While I am preparing any presentation, I will first ask several different people if I can do a trial run on them and get their feedback about how effectively I made my point. There is a powerful saying. *"Seek first to understand, then be understood."* The better you know your audience the more you will be able to adjust your message to be understood by all.

7. Get Feedback That The Message Was Received And Understood… This is actually a very easy step, but often it gets left out for a number of reasons. For instance, some times we are just busy, other times we don't want to offend others by repeating ourselves, and sometimes we just assume everyone understands what we are saying. However, regardless of the reason, getting feedback could have prevented both of the misunderstandings I listed earlier and many like them. Like it or not, it is a fact that everyone thinks differently, and everything is subject to the interpretations of the listener. As a gymnastics coach for many years, I quickly learned that when giving information or assignments, it was crucial to get each person to repeat his or her assignment. It only took a few seconds, but is saved so much time and frustration. As you realize the importance of effective communication, you will naturally begin to take the time to get feedback and avoid simple mix-ups.

8. Remember, Becoming A Better Communicator Is An Ongoing Process… And last but certainly not least, remember that becoming a better communicator is an on going process; something that takes time and practice to develop.

Keep in mind also, you can't find a solution and find someone to blame at the same time.

Miscommunication is inevitable, but is far better to realize this and learn from the experience. It is important to spend a few minutes learning to avoid the situation in the future, in addition it is much more productive than arguing or faultfinding which so often is the case. Good communicators realize this and are always working on improving every aspect of communication.

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Author, success-coach, and mentor, **Russell Foster** provides his clients the roadmap to a more empowering mindset. Whether it is one-on-one or in a large group setting, Foster loves guiding others to a more productive way of thinking and acting. Using powerful tools such as self-hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistics and EFT, Foster shares with his live audience and his readers the unlimited power of the human mind and how to tap into it their inner genius. Together he and his clients develop a new way of thinking to adjust to changes in the market and business and create new skills to overcome physical obstacles as well as psychological barriers.

In his upcoming book, *A Clear Slate* he takes his reader on a journey into the power of the mind, and more importantly, he stresses to each and every one of us, what we can do once purged of the limiting beliefs that plague so many of us.