

The Ripple Effect of Communication

As we all know communication is critical to an organisation. What we often don't understand though is how well that communication is being sent and received! We often use the analogy of the ripple effect when we explain the impacts of communication. Most people are familiar with the ripple effect that emerges from a pebble being dropped in a pond. Well this is the same with communication. How well do you understand what type of ripple is being sent out when you communicate and how well it is being received?

There are many different styles of communication. People wanting to communicate a need to get something done communicate on a scale from very direct to very indirect. There is a range of styles and often when people are communicating in different styles they tend to misinterpret or talk past each other.

Take for example a couple at home and one is communicating to the other about the need to get some milk. A very informative or indirect person (who is seeking buy in) might say "we are out of milk" and a very direct person (who is all about issuing directives and timely-task accomplishment) would say "get some milk". When you look at these two extremes you can see the possibility for problems. The indirect person may find the direct person incredibly bossy and impolite and the direct person might find the indirect person way to vague and manipulative ("why don't they just say what they mean?").

So when thinking about the communication going on in your workplace - could there be a mismatch in styles? If you are thinking about your workplace- what is your style of communication? Are you more direct or more informing? What are your colleagues or your team members' styles? Have you ever found out how your communication style is received/viewed by others? Most of us have heard the adage "message received is message perceived" – so what are people taking from your communication style?

We believe communication is the life blood of an organisation and we also believe it's the lifeblood of a good healthy relationship – personal or professional. Many times when coaching people we have come across what is merely a mis-communication that has ended up ruining a relationship or creating huge stress in the business.

Of course communication is far more than the words we use, it's the tone, the body language, the eye movement – in fact the current thinking suggests that up to 95% of what we communicate is not the words we use but in the delivery tone, body language and energy we are giving out.

If you do use a more direct form of communication you could be implying a relationship of “one-up” or in other words you do what I tell you to do because I am the boss, the parent etc. This may be appropriate but there may be opportunities even in those relationships to communicate in more of an informing way that implies a relationship of equality! Of course the informing style can also communicate to someone that you know more than I do or I have no power in this situation.

If you do spend time reflecting on your natural style of communication – don't confuse the relationship-defining aspects of your role(s) with what comes naturally for you as a person.

To become really good at communicating a message the use of storytelling can be incredibly powerful. Our ancestors used verbal storytelling to pass down the stories, myths, and legends and to teach others the way of their tribes. Look for more on storytelling in one of our future newsletters.

Want to read more? Some good references you can read to gain a deeper understanding of communication are

Understanding yourself and others: An Introduction to Interaction Styles, Linda Berens

How to Win Friends & Influence People, Dale Carnegie