

What is “Communicate”?

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We are all encouraged and admonished to communicate, communicate, communicate. But, really, what does “communicate” mean? This post examines four meanings.

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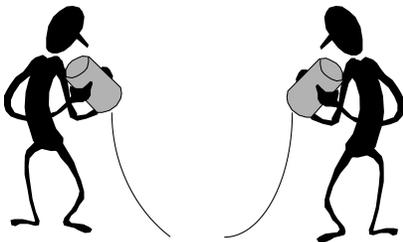
As trainers we are often called upon to support change efforts in one way or another. Often as not, that has something to do with communication. And, often as not, trainers pretty much go along with the program, that is, they do as asked. However, therein lies an opportunity for trainers to take the initiative and wield a little more influence than usual. As a trainer, you can help your clients expand their view of communication and thereby improve the change effort itself.

Here’s how.

One of the most persistent pieces of advice regarding change management is “Communicate, communicate, communicate.” This repetitive counsel generally means those leading the change should keep hammering home the message. That’s true enough but that’s only part of it. Let’s begin expanding the view of communication by adding a fourth repetition so that the counsel becomes “Communicate, communicate, communicate, and communicate some more.”

Now, let’s examine four different uses of “communicate” and see how they can contribute to the success of the change effort.

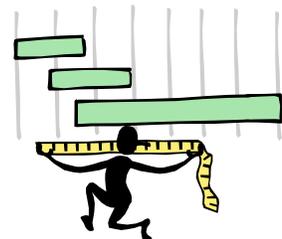
Communicate (1). A first use of “communicate” does indeed refer to “hammering home” the message, of continuously and constantly broadcasting the reasons and rationale for the change – for its necessity, for its value, for its nature, and for the form it takes. But repeating the same message over and over, even though it is absolutely necessary, isn’t enough to get the job done. Suggest to your clients that something else is also required.



Communicate (2). A second use of “communicate” refers to recognizing that people are different and, psychologically speaking, they are in different places at different times. Accordingly, they hear and don’t hear different things at different times. The message, then, must be varied so as to take into account the differences among people and the different places a given person might be in at a particular time. If not, the message won’t get through. And the same

basic message must be repeated over time so that people who weren’t ready to hear it will hear it when they are ready. The bottom line here is that your clients need multiple versions of the same message – and they have to keep hammering them home, too. You can help frame those multiple versions.

Communicate (3). A third use of “communicate” refers to the fact that, over time, the message itself needs to change. As a change progresses (or doesn’t), what needs to be communicated changes, too. Some things (perhaps the outcomes sought) might remain constant, but progress will vary as might the strategy and tactics associated with effecting the change. People need to be kept



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abreast of the change effort as it unfolds, emerges, progresses and even as it encounters difficulties and obstacles. You can help here, too.



Communicate (4). Finally, a fourth use of “communicate” reminds us that true communication is a two-way street, not a one-way broadcast. Your clients know what they’re saying (or at least they think they do) but, unless they check with their audience, they have no idea what that audience is hearing. Thus, this fourth use of “communicate” reminds us that active listening is every bit as much a part of effective communication as is the repeated broadcasting. So advise your clients to listen to what people are telling them about the change. You can help them hear.

To sum it up, what “Communicate, communicate, communicate, and communicate some more” means is that (1) your clients do indeed have to “hammer home the message,” (2) they also have to tailor their communications to fit the members of their audience and their state of receptivity, (3) they have to modify their communications to fit changing and unforeseen circumstances and (4) your clients are well-served by listening to what other people have to say about the change because what these other people have to say is just as important to your clients as what your clients have to say is important to the audience. As a trainer, your grasp of communication and target audiences puts you in an excellent position to help your clients increase the odds of a successful change effort.

Contact the Author

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