



SENDING THE RIGHT MESSAGE

People are communicating all the time. It's something so basic, most professionals assume they are competent at it, or even expert.

And yet, we find that failure of communication is one of the most common sources of workplace trouble.

The most frequent problem? The assumption by one side that the message the other party hears is the same as the message they think they are sending. The fact is, the message is often very different depending on which side you're on. One of the key secrets of a great communicator is knowing how to manage that gap, and get the real point across to the other side.

WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?

There are two phases in any communication—sending the message, and perceiving it. You can't control what goes on in the other person's head, but you can take steps to minimize the risk that the perceived message will differ significantly from the one you sent.

Know the result you want. Communication starts with having something to communicate—a goal. For instance, you may want to convey information, to communicate an emotion, to persuade someone to do or think something, to establish or validate hierarchy, or simply to reinforce social bonds. Be clear about the result you want from your message:

- What do you want the other person to know? What do you want them to feel? What do you want them to do?

- Think through the possibilities. Try to make sure that your message invites only the results you want, and not results you don't want.

MATCH YOUR MESSAGE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

There are usually many different ways to present the same message content. You need to choose the one that is best for the specific situation.

Know your audience. Who is the message going to? What style of message is right for them?

- For instance, some recipients react best to extremely detailed messages. Some react best to messages with a highly emotional element. Some respond well to humor. Some respond well to appeals to common values. Others react poorly to these things.

Some elements to consider include:

- The situation where the message will be delivered. (e.g. at the office? At home? At a project kickoff? At a project post-mortem?)
- What motivates and inspires the audience. (Are they in it for the money? For personal loyalty? For the good of the team?)
- Audience traits and personality. (Are they young? Experienced? Ambitious? Self-confident? Trusting? Reluctant to get involved? Good with numbers? Used to taking orders?)

Select the right method and mode Are you going to address a meeting, or a single individual?

What is your relationship with them? Are you giving instructions, or interacting as peers?

DON'T ASSUME THEY GET IT

In delivering a message, you need to make sure the recipient is perceiving the message as you intend it.

Explain your intentions, in detail if necessary. Make sure both you and the recipient understand the context and purpose of the message. Don't make the recipient "read between the lines" for your intent -- they may get it wrong.

Say what you mean. Don't leave things out. Don't be vague, or ambiguous, or talk around the subject. Don't make the other person have to guess what you're really trying to say. But *do* be tactful.

Check your assumptions. Make sure you're both "on the same page," both using the same words to mean the same thing, etc. Don't assume the other person knows the same things you do. Especially don't assume the other person feels the same way you do about everything.

Confirm mutual understanding. Summarize what each other said. Make sure you both agree what was said, and what was intended.

