



Talk versus Action—Planning

Communication is the second key step to getting ourselves into action. Planning got us started, and once that's ongoing, all the key people in our lives need to know the plan and their part in it. Project team communication is obvious. It is also critical, however, to communicate with management, peers, subordinates, and of course, our family and friends. This allows everyone to voice their questions, concerns, support issues, etc. with us, so that we can adjust our plans if needed.

So then, what and how should we communicate? If you've ever had a colleague that charges into your office or phones you every time he or she has an idea or issue, you might guess that this is not the recommended approach. It's far more effective if you get your communications organized by person. In fact, for key people, keeping an ongoing collaboration issue list is very

helpful, and its employment communicates a respect for their time that will serve you both well. We recommend prioritizing your list before visiting with key individuals, and discussing the most important ones first. That way, if you run short on time, the most critical items will be communicated.

Communication styles vary widely, so it is essential to tailor your approach for each person. Consider the other person's pressures as well as your own issues. For instance, if the person is fast paced and business focused, don't ask about their weekend! Get right to business. On the other hand, if he or she has a relaxed, slow paced style, match that too. Remember that people like people who are like themselves. Make them comfortable by patterning your communication after their style, and your communication will be far more effective.

Timely Humor

Even though he could not tell time, my three-year-old grandson was wearing a watch when I visited. Later, when I was putting on my coat to leave, I asked him what time it was. He looked at his watch blankly, then brightened. "It's time for you to go," he answered triumphantly.



Trivia Time

The same calendar can be used every 28th year. The year 2001, for example, has the same calendar as 1973. And your 28th year has the same calendar as the year in which you were born.

The one thing that we do more than anything else during our lives is sleep. Most of us sleep 6-8 hours a day, which averages out to more than 20 years of our lives.



Information Overload

An "information traffic jam" is snarling the Information Superhighway. So much information is available today that it's nearly impossible to keep up or keep track. Our daily struggle to manage Information Overload can cause mental and emotional distress, and even physical illness. And our constant worries that we will miss out on some vital piece of information can cause our work to suffer, and enable our

competition to seize advantage. As soon as we realize that we can regulate the flow of information we receive, we can begin to control its quantity and quality.

The following guidelines will help you effectively manage your information:

- Focus only on the information you truly need. Separate the wheat from the chaff.

- Avoid creating low-priority information files to review later. If the information isn't urgent initially, it's not likely to be critical later.
- Respond to, or immediately discard your mail, e-mail, vmail and faxes.
- Frequently cleanse and purge information.
- Recognize "information anxiety." You can't know everything you'd like to know, so you might as well relax.

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Communicating Under Pressure



While communication is always more art than science, it's far easier to be effective when you have time to prepare your thoughts. In today's fast paced, high pressure society, prep time is a luxury that often evades us. It's these circumstances that derail many of us. While nobody gets it right all the time, there are some general approaches that help to increase our odds of success.

Be sure to practice positive techniques whenever the pressure is off to develop strong reflexive skills.

When someone 'attacks' or 'embarrasses' you, take a deep breath before responding. The old 'count to ten' technique truly works since it sends badly needed oxygen to the brain.

Manage your emotions. That oxygen will come in handy here too!

Focus on the issue at hand, not on any perceived personal attack. The only thing we can guarantee is that people will say stupid things. How we react to them will largely determine what people think of

us. Ironically, when we become defensive, people often assume that we are insecure, probably with good reason! Instead, relax and refocus the discussion on the real issue.

If communication is an area of challenge for you, it may be smart to seek support.



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Fun at the Office?

Effective leaders find ways to ensure that their team remains motivated and energized. For most people, that must include some 'fun' time. One of our clients went so far as to build a miniature golf course into their offices, including a hole to drop to the lower floor for the second nine! For most of us, it means keeping a sense of humor and encouraging the 'office organizer' to do their thing. Often there's a person on the team that likes to plan an occasional party or outing. Let them do their thing, and provide them with support when it's needed.

The bigger question that we

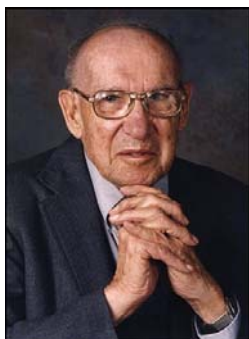
often hear is about 'boundaries'. What is appropriate? How do we know if they've gone too far? Here are the guidelines we use:

1. Fun activities during work hours are mandatory for team building reasons.
2. Fun activities outside work hours are optional, unless we're on the road together.
3. No individual will be singled out for jokes or ridicule. Even if he or she can take it, it sets a poor precedent and may make others uncomfortable.
4. Sports or competitive activities must include a role

for everyone. Different physical abilities must be accounted for so that everybody is comfortable and included. Scorekeeping, commentary, etc. can be part of the plan.

5. Sensitivity to corporate titles is minimal during fun activities. It's the one time we're all peers.

Let us know if you have ideas to add to our list!



"Efficiency is doing better what is already being done."

Peter F. Drucker
(1909-)