

QUICK TIPS – *IMPERFECT COMMUNICATION*

Communication is understood to be built on the three pillars of *our words*, *tone of voice* and *body language*. The documented research indicates that these components are:

Our words 10%

Tone of voice 35%

Body language 55%

Note that these components work together in shaping the quality of our communications with one another, but that *our words* are the smallest contributor to the overall communication process. With this in mind, one deliberately could develop skills that would enhance the interpersonal communication experience.

For instance, we could choose *our words* very carefully and rehearse what we might say. Or, we could become acutely sensitive to our *tone of voice* and practise different styles that would be optimal in a given situation. *Body language*, encompassing physical demeanour and posture to eye contact, again are aspects that are readily available for improvement through reflection, training and practise.

These are the key elements that contribute to effective *face-to-face* interpersonal communication. What happens, though, when different communication channels are utilized and does the communication medium affect the quality of the experience? E-mail (and its little cousin, texting) is an excellent example.

E-mail is fantastic for certain types of communication – particularly those which are dealing with facts, statistics or straightforward procedures. Furthermore, with just a simple click, additional people can be included in the communication.

This is great if the communication is appropriate and germane to those people, but it becomes an organizational disaster if they have been included without thoughtful consideration or is the result of a CYA-bias. The latter situation results in an unrelenting avalanche of e-mails that can virtually paralyze an organization.

Let's consider the quality of the e-mail communication experience. There is an absolute absence of *body language* in a communication delivered by e-mail. As a result, the communication immediately suffers a degradation of 55%!!!

Although possible, *tone of voice* (disembodied, as it is) is extremely difficult to reflect in an e-mail. This often leads to misinterpretation, as well as a further 35% degradation in the process. All that is left is *our words* and often in the bustle of a busy business day, insufficient care is taken in even constructing the message.



It can be seen that, at best, communicating through e-mail will provide no more than 10% of an effective interpersonal communication experience. In fact, this mode of communication is better described as written communication.

When communicating about situations that have complexity, nuances or imbedded conflict, using e-mail as the communication channel is totally inappropriate, because it is so fundamentally ineffective. Once initiated, it is more than likely to stimulate a virtual cycle of escalating e-mails that fails to provide the necessary clarification, saps away valuable time from the organization and inevitably frustrates everyone.

In these types of situations, it would be better to pick up the phone and talk with the other person. This approach would incorporate *tone of voice*, thereby improving the communication experience by a potential 35%.

Even better still, leave your computer and go and chat with the other person. That way you can look them in the eye, modulate your voice, project your physical respect for them, and clarify meaning as the conversation progresses. This will maximize the overall effectiveness of the interpersonal communication process.

More consideration and attention need to be applied in selecting the most appropriate channel for effective interpersonal communication. In order to achieve this, we all must get off the “*automatic mode*” in which we seem to operate and become more rational, thoughtful and deliberate in managing our communications.

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