



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

To be an effective leader you must be an effective communicator. Many times, we assume we are communicating when we aren't. Alternatively, we assume we have not communicated something that we actually did (unintentionally via body language, calendar decision, a passing comment . . .).

A way to determine if you are communicating as well as you think you are is simply asking your listener to play it back for you: "I want the forecast for the eastern divisions, at a top line level, put in presentation format by the end of the week. Does that make sense to you? What is your understanding of what you need to do?"

As to the unintentional communication, this is more nuanced. This takes awareness, alertness, and slowing your pace (which helps with the first two).

And of course, communication is a two-way street; it is both outgoing and incoming—speaking and listening, or writing and reading.

One simple method for effective inbound communication is mirroring; that is a subset of reflecting, wherein the listener briefly repeats back almost verbatim the key words or last few words.

- Joe: The sales meeting was way over the top and over budget.
- You: Over budget, you say?

Reflecting is a bit more all-encompassing in that it usually involves not only reflecting back the message but also the underlying feelings. This is a good way to ascertain if you are "getting" the message. Both methods help the speaker continue; reflecting helps him feel that he is understood.

- Joe: The sales meeting was way over the top and over budget.
- You: I can see that you are angry about the sales meeting and your assessment that it was over the top and over budget.

Another method is validating, which is similar to reflecting, but takes it one step further—you show acceptance of the person's feelings (while not necessarily agreeing). "I can certainly understand why you feel the way you do . . ."

By practicing these skills as a leader, you will find better outcomes such as less wheel-spinning or duplicated effort, a higher level of morale and improved relationships on your team, fewer misunderstandings, and faster execution of plans and strategy.

In summary:

1. When you are speaking, ask for the listener's understanding.

2. As a leader, stay alert to signals you might send. Leaders are always being watched and perhaps over-interpreted. Slow down and think before you communicate or act.
3. If you are the listener, mirror to indicate understanding and prompt a speaker to continue on.
4. Reflect the speaker's message and feelings back to the speaker.
5. Indicate you accept the person's feelings—whether you agree with them or not.

You may also find these skills have a positive impact on relationships with friends and family as well as in the workplace.

Have you ever thought you were crystal clear only to wonder how the receiver of a request went in a completely different direction? What communication techniques do you need to practice?