

Communicating for Results

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Previous articles in the "Managing for Results" series have addressed setting goals, achieving results, and managing time. This concluding article will attempt to put these ideas into an operational framework from the viewpoint of communicating for results. For managers, the two most highly sought skills are effective speaking and writing; there is no single aspect of supervision or management that does not require these tools. Listening is equally important because communication is a two-way process. Nuclear medicine managers, along with all others in the health professions, must master these skills for personal and professional growth and goal accomplishment. A worksheet is included to direct your thinking about the key ideas addressed below. Those wishing to earn CEU (VOICE) credit for these continuing education articles must return a completed worksheet for each article in the series.

Managerial vision is first determined by self-vision and self-assessment. The language in which we speak to ourselves greatly determines the outcome of all our interaction with others. Positive "self-talk" turns into positive dialogue with all those with whom we come in contact. Our "world view" or assumptions about others also determines our behavior. When we are not too critical of ourselves, when we have that necessary tolerance for our own ambiguities, then we can deal with others in the same manner.

Do you say to yourself, "you are a dummy," or do you say, "That was a dumb mistake, but next time I'll do better?" It may take practice to erase the negative socialization that many of us have learned to take for granted and tune out. But it is important to do so for this negativity can erode one's self-image, which we then present, either orally, in writing, or in our body language to the world. Being sensitive to this is the first step in setting goals for more effective communication.

Written Communications

Policies, procedures, memos, and agendas are commonplace communication tools. How these are written can determine whether the desired outcome is achieved. A garbled memo may totally confuse the receiver when it was intended to clarify and to inform. It is also important to establish written response times and to adhere to them. This is a departmental statement of commitment to the clinician and the patient.

In all communication, goal setting is necessary. Ask yourself, "What do I want to happen as a result of my communication?" Reread your policies and procedures. Are they clear and written on a level that can be understood by

the "stake-holder"? The same holds true for your memos. Do they conclude with your request for action, do they include a response time and date, or the how, when, and why? Read them from the bottom up, let others read them and seek confirmation that what you intend to say is what you are really saying.

Your checklists for a new employee, for orientation and training, and even how your performance appraisal is worded are all statements of your managerial vision, and the means by which you attain goal accomplishment. Look at them from the receiver's viewpoint. An excellent exercise to check on your ability to give clear, understandable directions is to write a set of instructions for an imaginary housekeeper or gardener—a person you will not see. Then ask someone else to see if he or she could follow the instructions and get the job done to your satisfaction. You may surprise yourself and get a good laugh at the same time.

Listening Skills

We all, unless there is physiologic impairment, hear to some degree or another. This does not mean that we listen. That we are listening does not necessarily mean that we have understood. The foundation of any communication—oral, written, or nonverbal—is that the message is understood. One must be aware, however, that even though the message is understood, it cannot be assumed that the desired action will take place. But be assured that without understanding, either no action will ensue or unintended actions will be your unanticipated outcome.

Feedback

The only way we can find out if our message is understood is through feedback from the receiver. The receiver is the reader, the listener, or the recipient from some other sense such as touch. Each of us has a preferential way in which to receive. In order to facilitate listening, the receiver is also required to take responsibility for his part of the communication process. This can be accomplished by a variety of behaviors. Active listening means the listener is involved in the process. He or she asks questions, seeks clarification, encourages the sender or speaker, pays attention to content, and eliminates as many distractions as possible. Barriers to effective communication can take place anywhere between the sender and the receiver. Strong emotions such as anger, worry, or anxiety can alter reception. Sitting in a room that is too hot or cold is a distraction as are noise, poor lighting, and garish, messy, or dirty surroundings. Too many people talking at once or too fast and foreign accents can also interfere.

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Assumptions

We hear what we want to hear. This is also called selective listening. Always check your assumptions. Are they in sync with others? In professions where precision is highly prized, most of us are very imprecise in our choice of words. Think about your use or other persons' use of words like *many*, *few*, *shortly*, *soon*, *tall*, *small*, *huge*. Consider the more colloquial words like a *tad*, a *smidge*, and a *pinch*. Look at some old recipes—is there any wonder why mother's cooking can't be copied? Seek clarification; don't assume or take for granted that you understand. Learn to interject with "What does that mean?", "I don't understand.", "Would you explain that again?", or "What do you mean?". When you are the receiver, it is your responsibility to make sure that you understand what was intended for you. When the message directly affects you and your job, you are the "stake-holder", and how you interpret could help you keep—or cost you—your livelihood.

Summary

Talking does not mean that we have communicated. Hearing does not mean that we have understood. Communicating for results is the essence of management. To be responsible for our communications ensures those results. Remember, you cannot *not* communicate. Since you are always communicating, make the opportunity to send (and receive) the very best.

Suggested Readings

D'Aprix R, *Communicating for Productivity*, Harper & Row, New York: 1982.

Munn and Metzger, *Effective Communication in Health Care*, Aspen, Rockville, MD: 1981.

Rogers E, Rogers R, *Communications in Organizations*, Free Press, New York: 1976.

Treese M, *Communication for Business and the Professions*, Allyn & Bacon, Boston: 1983.