

Developing Effective Communication Skills – An Important Aspect for Engineers & Doctors

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Abstract

The paper presents helpful suggestions for developing effective communicative skills in engineers and medical doctors.

Key words: communication skills, useful methods to develop skills, need for engineers and doctors to develop effective communication skills.

Communication

Communication is an exchange of ideas, expression, knowledge, views, etc. between two or more than two people. Communication is one aspect necessary to convey message but effective communication is of most importance for a busy professional, like a doctor and an engineer, who are busier and have to interact with variety of people. They interact with people of various age group, social status, level of education, various professionals, varied cultures, etc.

This paper deals with the various aspects which make the communication effective like nonverbal signs, attentive listening, furnishing group goals, team culture, etc.

Communication Is a Process

Effective communication requires paying attention to an entire process, not only the content of the message. When one is the messenger in this process, he should consider potential barriers at several stages that can keep the audience from receiving the message correctly.

The sender has to be aware of his attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and credibility with the receiver which might obstruct or alter whether and how the message is received. Awareness of

sender's own body language when speaking, the attitudes and knowledge, diversity in age, sex, and ethnicity or race adds to the communication challenges, as do different training backgrounds.

Individuals from different cultures may assign very different meanings to facial expressions, use of space, and, especially, gestures. For example, in some Asian cultures women learn that it is disrespectful to look people in the eye and so they tend to have downcast eyes during a conversation. But in the United States, this body language could be misinterpreted as a lack of interest or a lack of attention.

Selection of Medium

The selection of right medium for the message one want to communicate is very important for effective communication. E-mail or phone call?, Personal visit?, Group discussion at a meeting?, Notes in the margin or a typed review? Sometimes more than one medium is appropriate, such as when a Doctor give the patient written material to reinforce what he has said; or when a Sales Engineer follow-up a telephone conversation with an e-mail beginning, "As we discussed..."

For one-on-one communication, the setting and timing can be critical to communicate effectively. Is a chat in the corridor OK, or should this be a closed-door discussion? At office or over lunch? For this the mindset and environment of the receiver should be considered. Also the sender should defer giving complex information on someone's first day back from vacation and even if the sender is aware of situations that may be anxiety-producing for that individual. Similarly, when calling someone on the phone, it should be asked initially if it is a convenient time to talk. Offer to set a specific time to call back later.

Finally, content of the message to be communicated should be well organized. It is also necessary to see that the information to be conveyed is not too complex or lengthy for either the medium used or the audience. Use language appropriate for the audience. With patients, avoid medical jargon.

Body Language

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The sender should not shy with the person with whom he is speaking. He should be relaxed, but not slouching posture, regardless whether one is speaking or listening. Other things that ensure the body language in the conversation include:

- Making eye contact
- Nodding occasionally to acknowledge a strong point in the conversation.
- Standing with hands clasped in front, never crossing arms.
- No displaying nervous ticks such as wringing hands, picking at your nails, or anything that the receiver view it as a distraction from their conversation.

Speech and Attentiveness

When speaking one need to be clear and concise. The speaker should directly talk on important matter and should not waste time on long drawn out stories as it gives space to the listener's mind to wonder. Even if the message is crystal clear to the sender he should not expect same from the receiver and hence should ask the receiver for any doubt or query.

In addition to the sender's role in effective communication equal role is to be played by the receiver for which he has to be an effective listener. Listening is very important in communication as it leads to an effective feedback which ultimately makes the communication successful and effective.

Communication Consistency

A successful employee, employer or a doctor makes his communication consistent as he reveals the fact that he is always available for further talk and never says that he is busy with other assignments. Communication lines should be left open to those who made need to address their problem with the speaker. Doing this will prevent the small issues that normally have the habit of becoming large ones.

Patience

Patience is of much importance to a doctor and even to an engineer. A doctor has to patiently listen before advising prescription to a patient. Many of people's communication lines tend to break on the side where impatience is in a rush to get out of the conversation.

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Practicing Effective Communication Skills

If someone has communicated a need or an issue then the main priority should be to aid him or her in repairing the problem. Following up on an issue especially for the marketing professionals is the only way to convince others that they have been listened with their problems and solution.

Practicing strong follow-up will also leave an impression that the customers are dealt with first priority and feel good in doing business with such type of companies where employees are spontaneous in response. This creates a loyal and discerning surrounding that cultivates positive movement and communication. This will develop a strong sense of confidence and bonding with whom the communication has taken place.

Accustomed to Body Language- Speaker and Receiver

Many nonverbal cues such as laughing, gasping, shoulder shrugging, and scowling have meanings that are well understood in our culture. But the meaning of some of these other more subtle behaviors may not be as well known.¹

Hand Movements

Human hands are the most expressive body parts, conveying even more than the faces. In a conversation, moving hand behind the head usually reflects negative thoughts, feelings, and moods. It may be a sign of uncertainty, conflict, disagreement, frustration, anger, or dislike. Leaning back and clasping both hands behind the neck is often a sign of dominance.

Blank Face

Though theoretically expressionless, a blank face sends a strong do not disturb message and is a subtle sign to others to keep a distance. Moreover, many faces have naturally down turned lips and creases of frown lines, making an otherwise blank face appear angry or disapproving.

Smiling

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Although a smile may show happiness, it is subject to conscious control. In the United States and other societies, for example, the sender is taught to smile whether or not he actually feel happy, such as in giving a courteous greeting.

Tilting the Head Back

Lifting the chin and looking down the nose are used throughout the world as nonverbal signs of superiority, arrogance, and disdain.

Parting the Lips

Suddenly parting one's lips signals mild surprise, uncertainty, or unvoiced disagreement.

Lip Compression

Pressing the lips together into a thin line may signal the onset of anger, dislike, grief, sadness, or uncertainty.

Build a Team Culture

Both in Engineering and Medical field, as in most medical practices, much of the work is done by teams. Communication within a team calls for clarifying goals, structuring responsibilities, and giving and receiving credible feedback.

“Physicians in general are at a disadvantage because we haven't been trained in team communication,” says Cohn. He points out that when he was in business school, as much as 30% to 50% of a grade came from team projects. “But how much of my grade in medical school was from team projects? Zero.”

The lack of systematic education about how teams work is the biggest hurdle for physicians in building a team culture, according to Cohn. “We've learned team behaviors from our clinical mentors, who also had no formal team training. The styles we learn most in residency training are ‘command and control’ and the ‘pace setting approach,’ in which the leader doesn't specify what the expectations are, but just expects people to follow his or her example.”

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Cohn says that both of those styles limit team cohesion. “Recognizing one's lack of training is the first step [in overcoming the hurdle], then understanding that one can learn these skills. Listening, showing sincere empathy, and being willing to experiment with new leadership styles, such as coaching and developing a shared vision for the future are key.”

Stated Goals and Team Values

An effective team is one in which everyone works toward a common goal. This goal should be clearly defined and articulated. In patient care, of course, the goal is the best patient outcomes. But a team approach is also highly effective in reaching other goals in a physician practice, such as decreasing patient waiting times, recruiting patients for a clinical trial, or developing a community education program. Every member of the team must be committed to the team's goal and objectives.

Effective teams have explicit and appropriate norms, such as when meetings will be held and keeping information confidential. Keep in mind that it takes time for teams to mature and develop a climate of trust and mutual respect. Groups do not progress from forming to performing without going through a storming phase in which team members negotiate assumptions and expectations for behavior.²

Clear Individual Expectations

All the team members must be clear about what is expected of them individually and accept their responsibility for achieving the goal. They should also understand the roles of others. Some expectations may relate to their regular job duties; others may be one-time assignments specific to the team goal. Leadership of the team may rotate on the basis of expertise.

Members must have resources available to accomplish their tasks, including time, education and equipment needed to reach the goal. Open discussion of what is required to get the job done and to find solutions together as a team are important.

Empowerment

Everyone in the team should be empowered to work toward the goal in his or her own job, in addition to contributing ideas for the team as a whole. Physicians' instinct and training have geared them to solve problems and give orders—so they often try to have all the answers. But in an effective team, each team member feels ownership in the outcome and has a sense of shared accountability. Cohn notes, “You get a tremendous amount of energy and buy-in when you ask ‘What do *you* think?’”

Team members must trust each other with important tasks. This requires accepting others for who they are, being creative, and taking prudent risks. Invite team members to indicate areas in which they would like to take initiative. Empower them by giving them the freedom to exercise their own discretion.

Feedback

Providing feedback on performance is a basic tenet of motivation. For some goals, daily or weekly results are wanted, while for others, such as a report of the number of medical records converted to a new system or the average patient waiting times, a monthly report might be appropriate. Decide together as a team what outcomes should be reported and how often.

Positive Reinforcement

Team members should encourage one another. Take the lead and set an example by encouraging others when they are down and praising them when they do well. Thank individuals for their contributions, both one on one and with the team as a whole. Celebrate milestones as a way to sustain team communication and cohesion.

Conclusion

As professionals, an Engineer and a Doctor have to practice the guidelines necessary for effective communication, which are discussed here in this paper in detail. Also as a communicator a professional has to be a good speaker as well as a good listener to make his communication effective.

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