

## **IF YOU CAN ONLY BE ONE THING... BE A GOOD COMMUNICATOR!**

Many people believe that it's their technical skills or better yet – the skills they don't possess – that prevent them from professional success. Work experience is thought by some to be the deciding factor in whether individuals move up the internal ladder or even get their feet in the proverbial door. While technical skill sets and experience will always be important when companies are making hiring or promotional decisions, possessing good communication skills can be the ultimate qualifier in deciding whether or not to move someone forward.

In those instances where two or three individuals of similar skills interview for the same job, it's been shown that the individual who is often extended the offer is the one who communicates the best. In fact, there are times that an individual with a lesser skill set will get the job simply because of his or her communication abilities. If you communicate well, you have the competition beat by a mile. The question then is whether or not you're fostering good communication in everything you do.

There are some key elements that go into being a good communicator. Most importantly, you must take a sincere interest in what others have to say, regardless if you find the information boring or irrelevant. Unfortunately what sometimes happens is that we perceive our conversational partner to be saying "the same ole same ole" and we tune out. Ironically, this action can sometimes precede a brilliant idea that is completely missed because we've chosen to absent ourselves mentally. Good communicators know fundamentally that putting in time to ask the right questions and really listen to the answers is never time wasted. Are your communication abilities influenced at all by whether or not the person you're communicating with can help YOU? Do you communicate more respectfully with top-level executives than you do your peers? Are your motivations to communicate influenced by how much money a potential customer has to pay you? If so, it might be time to rethink your motivations.

Making others feel special is at the heart of communication success. When others feel validated and heard, they usually respond in kind. It's the old reciprocity idea: If you treat me well, I'll treat you well. Good communicators pick up on the little things that are important to others and remember important dates, events, and names. If you're not good at doing these things, you can never give in to your weakness. Get better at it! Practice!

Good communicators take the time to take the time. Do you hurry others along

when they speak because you have more important things to do? Do you stare at your computer screen when others are talking to you, assuring the other person that you're really listening? Studies have shown that if there's a contradiction between one's words and one's actions, the truth is perceived to lie in the actions. Make sure your nonverbal communication isn't thwarting your good verbal intentions.

Because work environments change on a continual basis, part of being a good communicator involves rolling with the punches. Your ability to make decisions that are well thought out and based on fact, not simply speculation or emotion, will be recognized as a valuable asset. If you need more information before you can move forward, ask for it. If you're confused by what you hear, ask for clarification. Make no assumption that asking for something makes you look foolish or stupid. Good communicators ask a lot of questions and then take action toward goals that will benefit both themselves and others.

Remember: We are all works in progress. By taking incremental steps to improve your communication effectiveness, you'll reap long-term professional rewards.

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