

- 5) Lack of understanding of technical language;
- 6) Inadequate common business knowledge;
- 7) Poor organization of ideas;
- 8) Prejudice or bias,
- 9) Poor timing of the message;
- 10) Defensiveness;
- 11) Emotional reactions;
- 12) Inability to understand nonverbal cues;
- 13) Personality conflicts;
- 15) Poor spatial arrangements;
- 16) Jumping to conclusions;
- 17) Lack of feedback;
- 18) Tendency not to listen;
- 19) Physical noise and distractions;
- 20) Differences in status or position;
- 21) Lack of trust; and
- 22) Differences in perception.

Written Communications

Writing is an important communication skill that you should develop as a small business owner. If the written word is unclear, then a lot of time and money may be wasted. Basic principles of effective writing can be learned, and all it takes is a little discipline and practice. Observe the following writing principles:

- 1) Determine the purpose of the written communication;
- 2) Analyze your audience;
- 3) Organize the message;
- 4) Use short, simple words;
- 5) Avoid overused expressions (cliches);
- 6) Use short sentences and paragraphs; and
- 7) Proofread.

These writing principles will give you a foundation for developing your writing skills. One important point should be remembered about writing: It takes practice. You can read, talk, or even listen about writing, but the only way to improve is to practice.

Once the fundamentals have been learned, they can be applied during specific situations such as writing letters and memorandums. Very often small business owners and managers need to write different types of letters or memorandums for different types of situations. Also, you must know whether a letter or a memorandum should be used and how it should be organized.

Generally, you would use the letter format when writing to individuals outside the business, and when the information provided or requested is not needed immediately. The memorandum, on the other hand, is used within the business and provides a written record for transmitting information internally. The memorandum requires the same care in writing as the letter, but the situation may not be as formal.

When writing the message, the situation determines how it should be organized. For example, the way you would write a sales letter may be different from the way a credit refusal would be written.

Report writing is another area of concern for some small business owners. Whether it is a proposal or an informational, analytical, or progress report, the same basic writing principles should be applied. But before the actual writing begins, sufficient research and organization must be accomplished.

Oral Communications

Making an effective oral presentation is an area where many small business owners need improvement. Whether the presentation involves a sales or training situation, good speech techniques can create an atmosphere of confidence, interest, and overall effectiveness.

Speaking effectively, possessing good interpersonal skills, and having a basic understanding of fundamental interviewing techniques will provide you with an effective managerial tool. Various business situations such as hiring, giving performance appraisals, and conducting surveys require effective interviewing techniques.

Some small business owners conduct occasional or regular meetings or conferences. If used effectively, these situations can aid in problem solving, policy development, and staff communications.

As an owner you should develop good meeting and conference techniques like planning, scheduling, leading, and questioning. Proper use of these techniques will enable you to conduct more successful and productive meetings and conferences.

Another communications skill you probably need to use often is proper listening. While many of us hear, few actually listen. Effective listening requires concentrating on the message as well as showing a genuine interest in the speaker. Whether you are trying to make a sale or attempting to settle an employee grievance, effective listening is basic to achieving a successful outcome.

Nonverbal Communication

Small business owners should possess the ability to read the many nonverbal cues employees, customers, and suppliers may communicate. If you observe gestures, facial expressions, tone variation, etc., the probability of effective communications is significantly increased.

The Communication Process

Any communications process shares similar characteristics. Some experience, fact, object, or idea is observed by the speaker or writer and these observations are encoded or translated into a message. The message is then transmitted through a medium such as a spoken or written word. The message is received and interpreted by the listener or reader, who then acts. Finally, feedback from the listener or reader is given to the speaker or writer. This signifies that the message has been received and understood. Of course, this same feedback process is then repeated by the speaker or the writer.

An assumption is made in a communication process that there has been a free flow of information from the speaker or writer to the listener or reader. However this assumption is not always realistic and problems occur that inhibit the free flow of information. These problems are often referred to as barriers, breakdowns, or obstacles to effective communication. An important point to remember is that these problems can develop within the speaker or writer, within the listener or reader, or in situations external to both.

As a small business owner you need to understand why communications problems occur. If you can identify these problems, you may be able to solve them. Some of the more common problems that often inhibit effective communications include:

- 1) A know-it-all attitude;
- 2) Resistance to change;
- 3) Lack of credibility;
- 4) Fear of distortion or omission of information;

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