



Project Pointers

Issue 11

July 2006

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The March newsletter generated many comments from readers, a reminder that the topic of **communication** is always important. As a review, communication is the interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing or activity. And, it implies both delivering and receiving. This newsletter issue will focus on paraphrasing and distance communication, important factors in project management. But before you begin reading, please ask a colleague to work with you during practice exercises.

The fundamentals of active listening that were outlined in Issue 10 are complemented by **paraphrasing**, a powerful communication tool. When you paraphrase, you restate the speaker's message to clarify and verify that you understood—you reflect the speaker's feelings back to her or him.

Watch for Marta's upcoming articles about aggressive behavior in the July and August editions of *Women's Business Cincinnati*.

As an example, a colleague might say the following:

This new boss is really difficult to take. He wants everything done his way and isn't open to any suggestions. When I try to explain how things could be done, I'm lucky to get a word in. He doesn't seem to understand that I'm trying to help—and that I'm not a soldier taking orders.

Using paraphrasing, you might respond:

Sounds like this is a frustrating situation for you, right?

This type of response may seem simplistic or uncomfortable at first, but it lets the speaker know that you heard and understand. It also creates an environment of trust and mutuality because you are letting the speaker know

how seriously you take the content. To practice paraphrasing, use the following **opening expressions**:

What you're saying is...

In other words...

What you mean is...

What you're telling me is...

If I understand you correctly...

What I'm hearing you say is...

Sounds like you're saying...

A project is an organized, temporary endeavor that creates a unique product or service.

Practice paraphrasing with your partner, responding to the following:

1. I was excited when this project started a couple of months ago, but that has changed recently. We've lost a few resources and changed directions. I get the feeling now, almost daily, that something is going to happen to make this project harder for us to do well and on time.

Your Paraphrased Response:

2. I have a terrible time saying no when I don't have time to get something done that a co-worker is asking me to do. I end up doing what they want at the expense of not getting my own work done.

Your Paraphrased Response:

No matter how accomplished you are at active listening, communication is always easier when it includes **nonverbal behavior**. As a result of rising meeting costs, increased technology options and reduced staffing, informal conversation is less common than it used to be. If your work is heavily dependant on the phone or email, you may not benefit from the nuances that accompany **in-person conversations** or observations. Three of these situations—talking on the phone, leaving voice mail messages and sending email--offer special challenges. The following suggestions may be helpful as you consider ways to improve project communication.

Most **telephones** do not allow for any visual cues. To make your telephone time more effective, try to pretend that the other person is right in front of you. Smile and set a positive tone. Then, give a professional greeting. Once you are past the standard greeting, try to remain patient and sound alive, not scripted.

If your time is limited, state this clearly. For example, you might say, "I have only ten minutes before a meeting. Would you like to chat briefly now or would you prefer that I call you this afternoon?" This gives the caller a choice and does not sound dismissive.

If you are not able to assist the caller, try to direct her or him to someone who can help. Directing the caller is a critical public relations moment and should not be rushed. Be sure to explain the transfer process and include an extension number if possible. If you put the caller on hold, explain the reason and solicit their acknowledgement first. And, always thank them for holding.

Voice mail brings its own challenges, in part because it is a one-way communication vehicle. First, make your outgoing message short and sweet. As long as your tone of voice and words are positive and welcoming, don't force a caller to sit through a ninety second message.

When you leave a message, give your name, purpose of the call, phone number and the absolute minimum number of details. Try to remain focused and concise. Ask for a specific action and leave times when you are available for a return call. In some cases, it is more appropriate to let the person know that you will be emailing details.

Even among close colleagues, **email** can generate confusion and sloppy communication. Deprived of nonverbals and working under intense timeframes, project email

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Successful Project Management
Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association
July 25 Columbus, Ohio
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can be highly disruptive. To maintain civility and avoid chaos, slow down...and remind yourself of the email guidelines.

First, think about when to use email. It is effective for sending interoffice memos, making simple inquiries or doing routine business transactions. It is also helpful and easy for providing status or news reports, recapping discussions or giving simple feedback. To stay on track with email, respond as quickly as possible and keep it short. Language should be constructive, written for your audience and free of jargon for external customers. In addition, be careful with humor. Make sure your use of case is appropriate—writing in caps is usually interpreted as “screaming online” and may not convey what you wish. Email is often forwarded and you have no control over where it is routed, so be sure to run spell check and exhibit the proper professional touch.

Many of the problems connected to email result from people using it when they should be talking and listening. Most **email is inappropriate** for sensitive topics, especially when words can be misconstrued. Performance feedback should never be offered online—even positive feedback is diminished—and email should not be used to resolve conflicts or concerns. Long, impassioned messages take on a life of their own, especially if a large number of colleagues are copied. Walk away from your computer and walk down the hall to find the person with whom you need to have a quiet conversation.

Try to practice these communication fundamentals over the next few months. The fall issue of Project Pointers will address strategic planning. Have a great summer!

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