



Communicating Effectively with Colleagues and Clients

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Successful partners communicate persuasively and effectively. They foster relationships and manage expectations. They write and speak compellingly, and clearly deliver their messages. They delegate efficiently and build in follow up measures. They listen to their audience and, if necessary, reframe communications. Successful partners win, keep and develop their clients; they also develop their colleagues and collaborate effectively with peers.

Are you a successful partner? Are you thriving at your firm and with your clients by raising your communication bar and keeping it high? The following four principles will enable you to improve your effectiveness when communicating orally or in writing with colleagues and clients.

Foster Relationships and Manage Expectations

Successful communication requires continuous relationship building. Whether developing associates, participating in firm management or providing client service, partners who cultivate their relationships develop trust, confidence and ease with target audiences. Consequently, their businesses grow, their associates flourish and they are valued as firm citizens.

By establishing best practice processes, as well as developing internal and external teams, these partners attain their targets. As building relationships takes time and effort, consider implementing the theory that it takes at least six "relationship touches" (lunches, e-mails, phone calls, one-on-one meetings, social events, follow ups, etc.) to meet your communication goals.

Write and Speak Persuasively; Deliver Your Message Clearly

Communicating effectively involves two key processes: delivering the message clearly and having it understood by the listener. Getting your message to your target audience requires preparation. With each communication, identify your audience and understand their needs. Focus on when and how you are going to deliver your message.

Clear thinking produces clear communication. Always ensure that the timing is "right" for your listeners and the tone matches the message. You can control how you deliver your message, not how your listener receives it. To ensure clarity, set your pace and follow a "roadmap." Give your audience information in digestible chunks and do not overpower them with technology and/or legalese. Gauge the quantity and quality of information your listener needs. Avoid information overload.

Delegate Efficiently and Build In Follow-Up Measures

To attain your goals, you may need to involve colleagues in the process. We know delegating is good practice, but it is often hard to do. Why? Some of us have had bad experiences and have convinced ourselves that "it is always easier to do it ourselves." Or, we are simply too busy and do not have time to supervise someone else's work.

We can all be more effective, however, if we leverage our capabilities by delegating appropriately. Remember to give the delegatee results to achieve; tailor each delegation to the specific instance, and establish real deadlines. Throughout the process, successful delegators want to maintain trust up and down the chain. Build in checkpoints and follow-up measures. These will demonstrate to your delegates that you hold them accountable for their assignments and maintain an avid interest in the final products. Encourage questions; maintain an open door policy and do not hover. Give authority and recognize achievements with independence (within established limits), and allow for mistakes. The successful delegator accepts responsibility for the final project but never forgets to share positive feedback. Delegatee achievements should be rewarded with more responsibility.

Listen to Your Audience And, if Necessary, Reframe Communication

How do successful partners complete the communication cycle? They focus on their audience, listening and responding to their needs. Best practices include maintaining eye contact and controlling body language to avoid conflicting messages. To listen effectively, these partners rely on their ears, eyes and intuitive "gut feeling." When looking at your listeners, what message are they sending back to you: Are you being clear? Are you saying too much, too fast? Are they "getting" your message? Do you need to reframe and relay your message in another way? Do you need to stop talking and ask them for their thoughts? Communication is a two-way process that requires each party to sometimes be quiet. You need to engage your listeners throughout the process in order for the exchange to be complete.

Win, Keep and Develop Colleagues and Clients

Communication is a critical practice skill, a proficiency that you build with each internal and external interaction. You will win, keep and develop colleagues and clients by communicating effectively. Effective communication will enable you to be a successful partner.

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