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A GATEWAY EDUCATIONAL ENLIGHTENMENT ARTICLE

Subject: COMMUNICATIONS

What one problem stands out beyond all the rest when it comes to communicating with others in the office, at home or when dealing with any other living creature?

NUMBER 1 in life! WE ASSUME WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR!

STOP RIGHT THERE!!

Nearly every one of us humans have the same problem, unless we change our habits. The habit to change is: stop assuming, and start listening. Make sure of your sources. Don't let your mind fool you into thinking there is something in the communication, that's not in the communication. Either verbally or written. The following appeared in the February 24 issue of Newsweek in 1958....

A man living beside the road sold hot dogs. He had no radio. He had trouble with his eyes, so he read no newspapers. But he sold good hot dogs. He put up a sign on the highway, telling passers by how good they were. He stood beside the road and yelled: "Hot Dogs!, Buy your hot dogs here," and people bought his hot dogs.

He increased his meat and hot dog roll orders and he made his little store bigger to handle the trade. With his little business, he was able to send his son off to college. Sonny finished his studies and returned home.

And then something happened. His son said, "Father haven't you been listening to the radio? There is a big depression going on. The international situation is terrible, and we're not doing well here on the domestic front either."

Whereupon his father thought: "Well, my son has been to college. He listens to the radio and reads the papers. He ought to know." So, his father cut his bun order, took down his advertising sign and no longer stood by the edge of the road yelling "Hot-dogs, get your hot-dogs here." His hot dog sales fell off almost overnight.

"You were right son," the father said to the boy. "We are certainly in the midst of a great depression."

Bottom line: Communicating with other people is our weakest link in work or life! And we don't know why!

We all can get caught the same way. Whether you are a purchasing professional, or a business owner, we often will be doing something to waste a lot of time, and energy because we don't check out the territory. We often assume everyone thinks as we do. We let our minds tell us that is what that sales rep said, or why the Engineer designed it that way. We also believe we are superb listeners and we hear what everyone else misses (especially if we're married males). We are also very overloaded with information that comes from all 360 degrees. And if we express ourselves clearly, no one hears or pays any attention, mystifying us. Plus, why can't others do what we're thinking, and only do what we say? We know it's always the other guy's fault.

20 BASIC TECHNIQUES YOU CAN USE TO FIX ANY TYPE OF PROBLEM

1. **DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING!!!** Get all the facts before you make ANY decisions.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Make sure it really is a problem.

Continued on page 7



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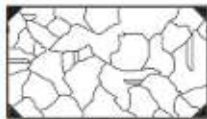
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4. *Think like a doctor. Treating the symptom will not treat the problem.*
5. *Communicate clearly with ALL those involved.*
6. *If others are involved, first, solicit their ideas of what you want or hope to accomplish.*
7. *Give advise, and consider others' advise as well.*
8. *Review your understanding of the problem.*
9. *Determine the importance of the problem.*
10. *Could the problem solve itself.*
11. *When should it be fixed. Prioritize and set a review, or a schedule!*
12. *Verify! Verify! And check it again. Make sure you have the correct info.*
13. *Make sure your solution doesn't make problems for other areas, and other people.*
14. *Look at all the options. Know where your team is on the ideas.*
15. *Don't assume the hardest way is the best.*
16. *Implement a change. Make a decision. THEN FIX IT!!*
17. *If that turns out wrong, fix it again. Erasers are made to change thoughts.*
18. *It's OK to make a mistake. It's only a mistake if you don't try.*
19. *If it's important enough to do, then try to do it right the first time.*
20. *Think like a surgeon. Replacing parts that were removed isn't a good option.*

STRATEGY TO BETTER COMMUNICATIONS

None of us are perfect communicators. If you think you are perfect, you still have to deal with imperfect communicators like me. But, if we follow some simple guidelines we can all do a better job of communicating.

▶ LISTEN TO THE WHOLE MESSAGE, NOT JUST WORDS.

Watch expressions. Listen to the tone of the voice. Listening is only 50% of any communication. If you are busy thinking how you will respond, or come back to what's being said, you're not in the communication. So, how can we listen better? Here are some simple steps to practical LISTENING:

▶ LOOK DIRECTLY AT THE PERSON SPEAKING.

Communications with another person should be done with your undivided attention. You are not trying to solve the problem, you're trying to hear what someone has to say. If you want to talk to a person, LOOK, LISTEN AND CONTRIBUTE. DON'T CHEW GUM AND LISTEN AT THE SAME TIME. Stop trying to do two things at one time. Give your 100% attention to the person speaking. KEEP AND STAY FOCUSED! Slouching in your chair, tapping your pencil, looking into never-never land, being bored shows you really don't care to communicate.

▶ DON'T INTERRUPT UNLESS THE PERSON ISN'T MAKING SENSE.

Listen to what the person is saying. This is one of the quickest ways to end good communications. Your interruption says to the other person, "SHUT UP, WHAT I HAVE TO SAY IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT!! REMEMBER YOU MAY WANT SOMEONE TO LISTEN TO YOU SOME DAY.

▶ BE AWARE OF COMMUNICATION INADEQUACY.

We have been communicating a long time. Longer than we can remember. But doing it a long time doesn't mean we do it well. It's complicated, and it has too many areas that can go wrong, and probably will. We have no other choice. It's all we've got, so let's do our best to use it well.

▶ CHECK OUT THE TERRITORY

Get all the facts. Know before you hear NO, or say YES!

▶ CONSIDER THE SOURCE

People will tell you what they want you to hear, not necessarily what's good for you. Salespeople will only tell you the good points of their product, or the bad points if they want to sell you the upgrade. Your

Continued on page 9



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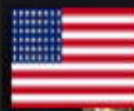
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stock broker gets paid to advise you of hot stocks. It is called commission if it's a sale. Check out the reason someone tells you something. There's a reason for everything said!

▶ **SPEAK TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR AUDIENCE**

Don't assume everyone understands your level of communication. People are often too proud to ask what a term or word means because it makes them feel inferior. Take a Fog Index of your writing every so often.

▶ **ASK QUESTIONS**

You won't appear stupid, but you will show interest. This could stop a lot of our problems. One good way to do this is paraphrase the information back to the speaker to see if they confirm what you believe you understood. If the speaker seems intolerant of your questioning him, it usually means they don't know the subject too well.

▶ **KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT**

Too often we offer something we don't fully understand. We pass on comments, ideas or judgments on subjects every day. What do you think about cyclamates? Any two cyclamates who live together should get married.

▶ **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY AND HOW YOU SAY IT**

EXAMPLE "Maurice has had a lousy year getting shipments out the door."
Instead, try this, "Maurice's Production Dept. has had some poor results from outside sources with pump problems, hydraulics designs and electronics, that has held up getting shipments out on time." Get your facts right, look at it from another view point before putting your foot in mouth.

▶ **DISPLAY YOUR TEMPER BUT KEEP EMOTIONAL CONTROL**

It's OK to get upset, angry, if the people working for you, or with you, are not paying attention to business. Prove to them you care. If morale is down, no one seems to care. Say so. Not as a fly off the handle, but as a strong statement of needed change.

If you do this, do it sparingly, only do it if it's an honest reaction, never abuse anyone and be quick.

BUT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCE, NEVER, EVER CHEW OUT A WORKER WHERE OTHERS CAN HEAR OR SEE YOU.

▶ **COMMUNICATE AT THE PROPER TIME**

Don't ask for a raise at the Christmas party. Don't discuss rabbit trail issues at a meeting not designed for that purpose. If you want your ideas to be received, do it when the other person's frame of mind is in the right light **AND THEY ARE READY TO LISTEN.**

HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

FIRST, What is the primary purpose of a meeting? Do they facilitate communications? Do you go to meetings and leave feeling little is accomplished? Do meetings seem to wander from subject to subject with no real purpose? Does anything really get done in meetings? To change this, here are steps to having a good meeting.

If you are running the meeting:

▶ **YOU MUST PREPARE FOR IT**

Know what the meeting is to accomplish.

Make a written agenda.

Make sure you have a grasp of the items. If you don't, go find out before the meeting.

Know who should be in the meeting.

Keep it simple. Don't bring in a lot of people who shouldn't be there.

Assign someone to take notes. Concentrate on controlling the agenda.

Continued on page 11



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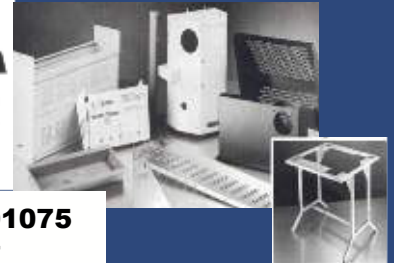
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▶ **RUN THE MEETING**

START ON TIME. TIME IS PRECIOUS.

Cancel or change time only for an extreme emergency.

State up front the purpose of the meeting.

Keep things on subject.

Let all people have their say.

Stop a discussion if it goes too long and perhaps call a separate meeting for that subject.

Slow down and stop any arguments immediately.

Don't let any one person dominate.

Watch the clock. 1 to 1.5 hours should be max. for any meeting.

If a meeting is to simply get everyone on the same page, or the agenda is short, conduct the meeting with no one sitting in chairs. You may be very surprised at how short and effective meetings can be.

Summarize and get agreement. THIS IS IMPORTANT

If formal notes are to be passed out, do it immediately while things are fresh.

▶ **YOU MUST FOLLOW UP CLOSELY**

Never assume everything takes care of itself.

▶ **DO NOT OVER COMMUNICATE**

If you say too much, you may confuse the listeners.

Saying too much takes the focus off your major points and buries them in the rubble.

Over communication is just plain boring.

The word 'and' is dangerous to other's health. It can make them sick of you.

▶ **REMEMBER COMMUNICATION IS A TWO WAY STREET**

Communication should be a two way street with lots of interaction.

It's the joint responsibility of both parties.

SUMMARY

BECOMING A BETTER COMMUNICATOR TAKES AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM, FOLLOWED BY EFFORT TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM. THIS OUTLINE MAY MAKE YOU AWARE OF PROBLEMS. HOWEVER, THE REST IS STRICTLY UP TO YOU.

Author's notes: When I changed vocations from Engineering to Purchasing, I discovered I had another problem that I didn't address in the coverage above. It is something every person needs to address and hopefully take actions to correct. Listening is the problem. When you are listening, is your mind going 100 miles an hour thinking about your come back, or focused more on what you'll say, or ask next.

I had that problem, and it's a hard one to correct. But you can do it, then once you command that ability you'll begin to notice other people doing that very thing. They hear, but they don't listen! They believe they need to be 10 steps ahead of the speaker's position.

If that describes you, work to correct it, and hone yourself to become a listener, and actually a better person to carry on a conversation with. Bill



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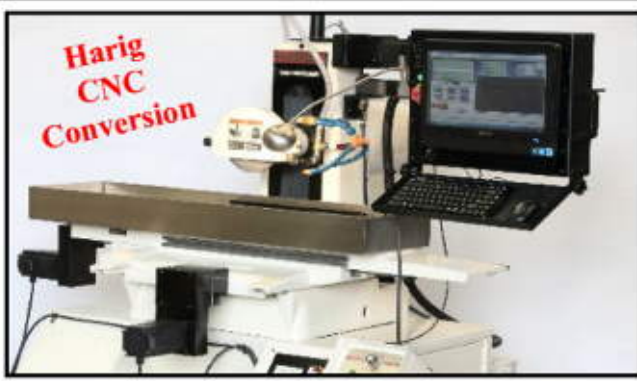
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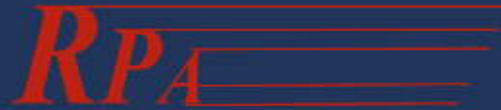


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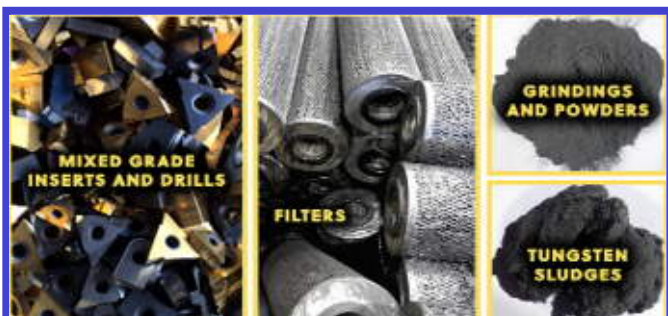
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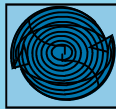
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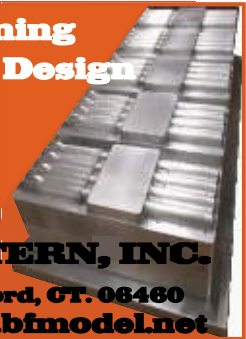
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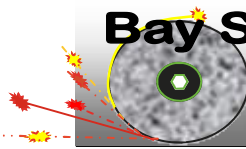
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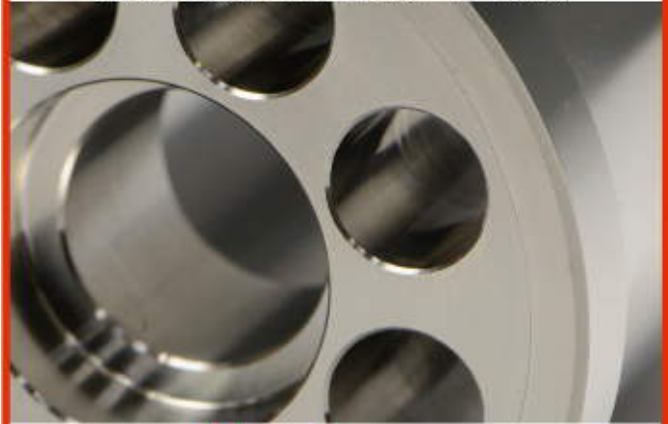
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