



Communication

A high percentage of conflicts between people are a result of a breakdown in communication, misunderstanding or an incorrect perspective of the situation and therefore continually improving one's communication skills should be part of any self-development goal. Effective communication leads to more harmonious relationships, efficient working teams and more successful outcomes.

We all know the breakdown of how we process the messages we receive from others - 55% visual (body language/eye contact), 38% vocal (pitch, speed, volume, tone of voice), 7% words. However, I'm left wondering with the rapid growth of technology – email, text, instant messaging, online networking whether the effectiveness of the messages sent are reduced. How many of you have discovered that your written word has been misinterpreted by someone else in the past? Can we really get over the lack of body language and vocal signals simply through the written word?

We also know that the quality of response you get to your messages gives you accurate feedback on how effective your communication has been. For example, when researching the development of online communication I typed 'communication' into Google and the top sites were offering:

Dictionary description

Regulations for UK communications industries

Courses on presentation skills

Support to individuals who find communication difficult due to disabilities

Marketing, leaflet and promotional staff

None of which were exactly what I was looking for. Quite clearly I needed to be more explicit with my choice of words – exactly the same as effective verbal communication between two people. Google took my words without body language, vocal intonation and without listening to the context of what I wanted. The result was not the outcome I was after.

Not only is effective communication about the messages you give but, perhaps more importantly, listening to the messages from others. How often do we take the time to truly listen to what others are saying? Coaches are trained to hone this skill to a very deep level and in my experience clients find this aspect of coaching extremely powerful because they have very rarely been listened to with that focus before. When we listen to such a deep level we truly hear the correct message given, we understand the perspective

from which that person is talking and we feel the emotions attached to what is being said. Again communicating using written word only through technology makes it even more difficult to listen, and therefore misunderstandings can occur.

Consider what we can do to minimise the chances of misunderstanding through online communication.

- Use vocabulary that the other person has used, where appropriate, to build rapport. For example, check whether they use visual, auditory or kinaesthetic vocabulary.
- Before responding, take time to consider the position from which the other person is responding. Perhaps put yourself in their shoes.
- Take time to choose your words carefully and re-read your writing before sending.
- Avoid ambiguous words and abbreviations as much as possible.

Technology will certainly continue to play a larger and larger part of our everyday lives, so it is important that we focus on our communication skills accordingly. Already the younger generation use this medium as a major communication tool, so we need to adapt and be flexible to ensure our communication skills evolve to keep up with the ongoing changes.