Module 6
Read Ahead

Effective Communication
The WHY
Module 6: Effective Communication, The WHY

Objectives

After attending the training in Module 5, participants will be able to:

- be aware of and better understand the importance of communication.
- gain insight into effective communication skills.
- demonstrate knowledge of key communication skills.

Introduction

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, whether this is **vocal** (using voice), **written** (using printed or digital media such as reports, websites, or emails), **visual** (using logos, maps, charts or graphs) or **non-verbal** (using body language, gestures, and the tone and pitch of voice).

Effective communication enables us to:
- Better understand and connect with the people around us
- Build respect and trust
- Resolve differences and manage conflict
- Foster environments where problem solving and decision making occur more easily
- Create an environment of creativity and innovation
- Lead teams and groups
- Maintain a collaborative environment

Importance of Effective Communication Skills

Statistics point to the fact that approximately 85% percent of our success in life is directly attributable to our communication skills. This means that no matter how ambitious, committed, or highly educated people are, they still have a low probability of success unless they develop the right communication skills.

As Dr. John Maxwell has written, “...leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less.” Acknowledging that influence is impossible without communication, this Module builds on Dr. Maxwell’s statement and makes the case that effective leadership requires effective communication. Module Six demonstrates that effective communication skills are required at both the personal and the organizational level. Effective communication is critical to the success of both the leader and the organization. It also plays a key role in our personal growth, effectiveness, and success. That should not be a surprise to us. Many of the most successful people in business, politics, and ALDOT’s history have been good communicators.
According to John Spence, business consultant, advisor, and author, the four biggest issues leaders deal with are:

- Lack of a well-communicated vision
- Lack of courageous communication
- Toleration of mediocrity due to the lack of communication
- Poor execution of key plans and ideas due to the lack of communication

Spence says that a lack of open, honest, robust, and courageous communication is the number one cause of problems in most businesses today.

At the 2015 Transportation Research Board meeting in Washington, DC, several Transportation Directors were asked about effecting change in their departments. The directors were asked about change, not about communication specifically.

- The Director of the New York DOT said that honesty was the number one means of effecting change. He went on to say that being honest and direct as well as communicating early and often are critical elements to managing change.

- The North Carolina Director suggested that listening to employees and listening to the community were key elements.

- The Tennessee Director gave as an example that he has shaken the hand of every TNDOT employee. ALDOT has about 4,400 employees for scale. A simple gesture, like taking time to shake hands, communicates trust on several levels.

- Committing to an encompassing communications strategy was a key in Minnesota. Being intentional and sharing as much as possible also helped guide the MNDOT Director.

Again, communication was not a part of the question posed; however, it was a critical element in the answers of each of these Directors. Director Cooper from ALDOT was not a part of that panel but was asked the same question later in an interview. His answer also emphasized the role and importance of communication during times of change. He spoke about commitment—a commitment that can be communicated. He said that any change the Department undertakes must be articulated and understood at all levels of the organization.

Whether our goal is to reduce typical issues in business, influence another person or an entire organization, or manage an employee conflict, effective communication is the key to success.
Keys to Effective Communication

It should not come as any great surprise that most leaders spend the overwhelming majority of their time each day in some type of interpersonal situation. As a result, a large number of organizational problems occur as a result of poor communication. Effective communication is an essential component of professional success whether it is at the interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, organizational, or external level. While developing an understanding of great communication skills is easier than one might think, being able to appropriately draw upon these skills when needed may not be as easy.

The best communicators are great listeners and astute in their observations. Great communicators are skilled at sensing the moods, dynamics, attitudes, values, and concerns of those with whom they communicate. Not only do they read their environment well, but they possess the ability to adapt their message to the environment. Most important for our own leadership, we must keep in mind that communication is not about us, our opinions, our positions, or our circumstances. It is about helping others by meeting their needs, understanding their concerns, and adding value to their world.

Good keys to communicating effectively as leaders are as follows.

- *Give the impression that you are on the same team.* Use words like “we, us, we’re, our,” and “ourselves” to build an instant bond. When you use these words, you show that you are all on the same team with a common goal or concern.

- *Show respect.* Mutual respect forms mutual purpose. Respecting the other person helps to produce trust and acknowledges your value of that person.

- *Learn how to use tone and body language.* Beware of a defensive posture or negative voice inflection. Make sure you use a friendly and welcoming posture, with open arms and a smile. If you sense yourself taking on a defensive voice or engaging in a defensive posture, then eliminate those telling signs.

- *Never assume anything.* Assumptions, such as merely assuming others see things in the exact same way you do, are another common problem. Most people do not see things the way you do or have the same feelings as you. The less you assume the better. Speak clearly and concisely.

- *Establish and maintain eye contact.* Eye contact is the number one indicator of good communication. If you have eye contact, you demonstrate confidence and credibility, show your focus is on the other person, and ask for their attention.

- *Say what you mean and mean what you say.* Be direct and honest; don’t dance around the issue or play games.

- *Ask for feedback to ensure the message you sent was accurately received.* This key goes hand in hand with assuming someone thinks the way you do. It is always appropriate to check with the other person to see if he or she understands your intent and goals.
• **Recognize communication issues caused by technology.** New technologies come with new technology-related barriers in communication. Sometimes email and phone messages can be misunderstood. These forms of impersonal communication usually doesn’t allow for non-verbal cues.

• **Effective receptive communication is based on good listening skills.** In every case, listening is a prerequisite. Communication is two way, or it is only a monologue.

**Quotes**

“The number one criteria for advancement and promotion for professionals is an ability to communicate effectively.” --Ralph G. Nichols, Listening Pioneer

“Developing excellent communication skills is absolutely essential to effective leadership. The leaders must be able to share knowledge and ideas to transmit a sense of urgency and enthusiasm to others. If a leader can’t get a message across clearly and motivate others to act on it, then having a message doesn’t even matter.” --Gilbert Amelio, President and CEO of National Semiconductor Corporation

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”
--Tony Robbins

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
--George Bernard Shaw

“The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”
--Sydney J. Harris

**References**

