



Communication: Improving the Process

Dr. Bernie Erven
Erven HR Services, LLC
Professor Emeritus
Ohio State University



Introduction

The theory

Communication is potentially the operations manager's most powerful tool!

The reality

Communication is often a source of great frustration and failure for both managers and employees

The good news

Communication is a skill that can be learned, practiced, evaluated and improved



Keys to your having lasting improvements in communication

1. Willingness to change
2. Honest self-evaluation of communication strengths and weaknesses
3. Specific and realistic goals for improvement
4. Coaching and feedback from someone who will be brutally honest with you

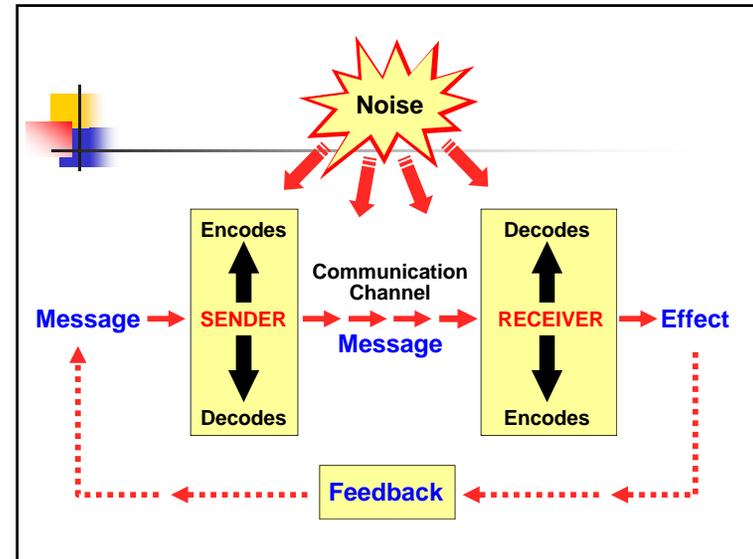


Bad news and good news

- Better communication will help solve many, **but not all**, interpersonal problems
- Close associates and good friends:
 - Know much about your communication strengths and weaknesses
 - Are willing to help you improve

Three basic questions

- How do we communicate?
- What are the barriers?
- How can we help each other communicate better?



Barriers to Communication

- Barriers complicate, confuse and interfere with everyday communication.
- Barriers may be recognized or unrecognized.

1. Muddled Messages

Messages that are:

- Ambiguous
- Vague
- Confusing



Some examples

- "Wanted – Saddle for 14 year-old girl"
- "We want happy employees."
- "We stand behind our commitments."
- "We are committed to the dairy industry."



2. Stereotyping

- *Perception – Assumptions not facts*
- "He will be a hard worker because he comes from a hard working family."
- "Numbers don't lie."
- "Nobody likes to argue."



3. Wrong Channel

- Slamming door to show anger
- Telling, not showing
- Remembering, not writing down
- Depending only on an employee to sell your farm to a job applicant



4. Language

- *What is a foreign language?*
- "Do you want to eat a grinder for lunch?"
- "Your salary will be \$2,500 per month."
- "Take the green goose down to the Gerken farm."



5. Lack of Feedback

- *Feedback is the mirror of communication – it mirrors what the sender has sent.*
 - “I know what I said; you don’t have to repeat it.”
- versus
- “Please tell me in your own words what I have told you.”



6. Poor listening skills

What are the signs?

- Passive rather than active listening
- Little interest in feedback
- Lack of eye contact
- Talking instead of listening
- Expecting message on silver platter
- Frowns, looks of doubt, shaking head no, defensive posture



7. Personal characteristics

- Arrogant *versus* Humble
- Unlikable *versus* Likeable
- Weak *versus* Self-confident
- Uncaring *versus* Caring
- Sour *versus* Humorous
- Unkind *versus* Kind



8. Disorganization

- Lack of written work protocols
- No or rushed training
- No time for questions
- Inconsistent answers to same question
- Meetings without clear beginnings, middles and closings



9. Lack of communication aids

- Telephones and radios
- Bulletin board
- e-mail
- Filing system
- Newsletters that are read
- Web site that is easy to navigate
- Meetings with written summaries
- Job descriptions
- Informal day-to-day interaction
- Formal and informal feedback on performance



10. Place

- Lack of interruptions
- Privacy
- No phones
- Comfortable chairs and table
- Refreshments



How serious is each of these barriers for you?

1. Muddled messages
2. Stereotyping
3. Wrong channel
4. Language
5. Lack of feedback
6. Poor listening skills
7. Personal characteristics
8. Disorganization
9. Lack of communication aids
10. Place



Improving communication

- Which barrier are you going to work on first?
- Which barrier are you going to work on second?
- Who is going to help you improve your communication skills?
- Who is going to give you feedback in three months?



The Good News!

- Everyone of us can become a better communicator
- Hard work and an open mind earn big rewards



In conclusion

1. Communication is a powerful management tool
2. Improving communication makes life better for both operations managers and employees
3. Tackling one or two selected barriers much more likely to be effective than a nebulous commitment to improve communication



Contacting Bernie Erven

erven.1@osu.edu

614-888-9953

5987 Rocky Rill Road
Columbus, Ohio 43235