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Verbal communication - how to communicate effectively

As a manager, you are the role model for the way conversations happen in your place, and your priorities are to:

- Guide, shape and extend discussions without taking too much control.
- Persuasively put their own view while also being open to other's views.
- Simultaneously encourage inquiry, yet also contribute as a colleague alongside others.

Useful tips

1. Be clear on your intent

What outcome do you want from this conversation? Before the conversation, identify what its purpose is and what outcomes you want from it.

2. Be passionate

Powerful conversations are clear messages passionately put. People run a passion-meter over your conversation. They link passion with your level of concern, credibility, commitment and authenticity. Lack of it gives an impression of insincerity, fakery and torpor.

3. Are you willing to be influenced

Being persuasive isn't always about completely getting your own way. Are you clear on what you want? Can you be flexible? Entrenched views just lead to unproductive, win-lose debate.

4. Advocate don't debate

Driving home your own view while diminishing someone else's is non-productive. It strengthens opposition and creates enemies not allies. By all means, be firm and back up what you advocate with benefits - no more than 3 or the points will lose impact - but be open to listening to other's views too.

5. Listen to understand others

To persuade someone to support something you want frequently means finding out more about what they want first. This takes skillful listening. If I can learn about someone else's thinking and what their needs are, I can often demonstrate to them how my way will give them their way.

6. Get out of first gear

If conversations were cars, most of us drive in 1st gear too much, focusing on what I have to say. While essential to get your point across, staying in 1st puts a strain on the conversational engine. So, remember to change to 2nd gear, - my best guess at how you think or feel. 'You' statements give others a turn in the driver's seat and move your conversation forward as people feel more included and contribute.



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7. Connect with people

Establish rapport - inquire after their thinking and feelings about the issue. See if you can build bridges for them to come over to your way of thinking that address the concerns you've picked up through careful listening.

8. Clarify your assumptions

When we don't, conversations get very cloudy. Many times we plonk conclusions/proposals into conversations without bothering to explain what lead us to them. Take a little extra time to let people know what's going on with your thinking and find out about other people's assumptions too ('What leads you to conclude that?')

9. Get rid of BUT

'But' is a very bad way to introduce what you have to say - even if you disagree with what the previous speaker said. It provokes defensiveness and adversarialism. Try 'and' instead. And, before you say what you have to say, why not acknowledge or appreciate what the other person has said first?

10. Structure your discussion

Many groups forget to agree a plan of some stages for their conversation before they start. They just launch in. This 5-P Model provides a useful framework:

1. Clarify the purpose and any conversational protocols or ground rules.
2. Start by finding out positions/ perceptions of people. Let each person have a say.
3. Move into paradigms and perspectives - deeper conversations where you reach a shared understanding of divergent views and perspectives.
4. Propositions - explore different options the group needs to decide on. If this isn't done, decisions will rarely be fully supported.
5. The fifth stage is proposals and plans - where the team decides an overall direction and plans together the actions to achieve it.

Further information

The following fact sheet provides further information on these issues:

- Verbal communication