

Misunderstanding Costs Money

There would not be a corporate employee alive that has not experienced the frustration of a communication breakdown that ended up costing the organisation money. The facts are that communication breakdowns are a part of everyday life within most corporate communities, but does it have to be this way?

Communication is the foundation of every relationship and some go so far as to suggest that the quality of your life will be attached to the quality of your communication skills. I tend to agree. If communication is faulty, and let's face it, there are many ways it can miss the mark, such as being late, unclear, dominated by office politics or through personality clashes, life as we know it, can become very tense and unsatisfying, as we rely on others to help us achieve our goals.

So let's look at some critical ways to create more successful communication outcomes. The foundation to successful communication is rapport. I am often asked in training courses to explain what rapport is. Essentially it is the process of reducing the perceptible differences that naturally exist between people.

Does rapport mean I have to 'have things in common' with another person such as common interests? The short answer is No. Rapport is simply a process of minimising difference. From the time when we were babies, we have been conditioned to a large degree to notice differences. Often 'society' has been seen to suggest that different equals bad. This obviously is not a useful view to have and as such different should simply equal different. No one is the same, yet we all need to belong in this world together. In an attempt to belong, we subconsciously try to build rapport by creating sameness with others. We literally can try to look like the people we most want to have relationships with.

Rapport means that we may begin to speak in a similar way (pace, inflection, choice of words), look a similar way (body language gestures and clothes) and even think in similar ways (supporting others views or looking for similarity between their views and ours). When we do this well, we create the feeling of being in rapport and if we feel it, there is a good chance the other person will feel it too. You may feel there is a meeting of the minds, where information is being exchanged freely and easily and understanding exists on levels that go beyond just the meaning of the words being exchanged. When there is a high level of rapport, misunderstandings rarely happen because both parties are engaged in the communication at a deeper level. So, the real issue in minimising communication breakdowns is therefore related to consciously creating rapport.

Let's look at how to do this. There are three key areas to pay attention to.

1. Body Language: Notice how a person stands, sits, uses gestures, has more or less eye contact etc.
2. Their tone of voice: Pay attention to pitch, emphasis, pace of speech, energy, etc.
3. Choice of words: Notice the choice of words they choose to describe things.

When you notice the three areas above, the challenge is to change what you are doing in order to create a level of similarity between you and the other person. To do this, match, mirror and pace. This refers to matching at a slightly lower level for example, the person's vocal volume or pace. Try to mirror body language gestures by subtly sitting or standing in a similar way. Finally, occasionally use their choice of words when you respond to them and their questions.

When this is all done on a subtle level, that is with positive intentions to build a strong level of rapport, then understanding between the two parties will be maximised. How long does all this take? Well, for some people and if you look at people you know, you will almost certainly know someone who is excellent at this, and they can build this rapport in an instant. Great concert singers can make you feel as though they are singing only to you when you are in reality, just one in 30000 people in the stadium.

The critical thing about rapport is that from a leadership perspective, you can not lead effectively without it. To lead without rapport is to simply tell someone what to do. When you have rapport you can influence and persuade at subtle levels, which have maximal impact on results.

So in summary, take more notice of how you are communicating with the people around you. Notice their words, tone and body language and match and mirror until you feel the connection. When you feel the connection, enjoy it as the other person will feel it also and you can experience the rewards of having an understanding communication with that person which will save you both time and money.