

Communication in the toughest of times

Whether we are working with individuals, clubs or chapters, it has become clear that the lifeblood to the success of a career, a life or a group of people is communication. Because we all as individuals know how to talk we may think of ourselves as good communicators. The best communicators are the ones that are constantly looking at this skill with the goal of improving it. They are also aware that although they may have some pretty good skills in this area, there are times when they don't demonstrate it. Our effectiveness as a communicator varies and this simple awareness can make us a better communicator.

We also meet people who tell their people something once and can't understand why the message isn't getting through.

This article is aimed at the great communicator who wants to take their communication skills to another level. I will start with this thought: "It is easy to be a great communicator when things are easy." The question is how are we as communicators when things are not going well?

I think we would all agree that powerful communication is a key ingredient to our success. Yet when times get tough communication often diminishes or disappears. When relationships are breaking down, when criticisms are plentiful, when economics are making things more difficult, when the team is losing and it seems like more communication is needed, we tend to communicate less.

Think of the times when you are at your worst as a communicator. It is possible that you are not aware of how you communicate in the worst of times because you are so focused on whatever is making it a bad time. If not being present is an enemy to great communication, then being in the middle of one of those times may make being present feel almost impossible.

How are you as a communicator when you are sick, tired, stressed, overwhelmed or scared? If you are like most people you are not even close to your regular communication skill level when these conditions are present.

When we teach people to be Extraordinary communicators we tell them that the best in the area of communication are not just focused on what they say but rather how it lands. What you intended people to receive is not nearly as important as what they did receive. In other words, in the communications process your success depends not only on the way you communicate, but also on how the receiver receives.

The next question is how is the receiver of the communication in the toughest of times? How successful will you be in communicating when they are sick, tired, stressed, overwhelmed or scared? As you can see in tough times we have a recipe for communication failure. When we are in tough times we just want to get past them, yet the resulting poor communication can make getting past them take longer.

Here are some ideas for successful communication for the toughest of times:

Have a communication plan for tough times

Instead of being a victim of tough times or just wishing they didn't exist, acknowledge them, anticipate them and decide to be different or more present during these times. What would it be like if you chose to be a better communicator when times are more challenging? You might acknowledge that although you may not be at your best, you will do your best. When we operate with an awareness of our challenges and shortcomings, others may be more open to acknowledging their own.

You can decide to increase the frequency of communication. A while back when I lost my job as a club manager I had a friend that explained to me that he would be calling me once a week until I told him I didn't need him to call as frequently. Instead of feeling isolated during a challenging time his communication plan made me feel connected and supported.

You can also make sure you are going into the conversation with a clear intention. What is it you are trying to get out of the conversation? What outcomes are you looking for? If you can communicate your intention to people then they don't have to speculate about your intent. If you are there to keep the lines of communication open, say so - if you are there to help them get rid of their fears or reduce their stress, say so. We find that often people go into a conversation with no conscious intent or an intent that is different than the one the listener thinks they have.

Decide if it is more important to be right or to be successful. We have encountered many situations where one side of a conversation would sacrifice success in order to gain the satisfaction of winning the argument.

Ask more questions! The quickest way to gain clarity, understanding and trust is to get out of the habit of assuming you know what people need or what they are thinking. The skill of asking powerful questions and truly listening to what they say and what they don't say can help you get through the tougher times quicker.

Strive to understand and be understood. Find out ways to communicate best with others and help them to understand how to best communicate with you. If there are things they do that get in the way, let them know. If there are things that you can do to make communication better, find out what they are.

Be grateful. Be grateful for the opportunity to have the conversations and for the chance to build a skill.

Being an extraordinary communicator in the toughest of times can set you apart as a leader and reward you with a significant ability to give people the energy they need to achieve the most significant goals.

