



Communication... in the Toughest of Times

In our work as coaches (and in living life!), it has become clear that the lifeblood to the success of a career, a relationship, a life or a group of people is *communication*.

We have noticed that 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 good skills, there are times when they don't demonstrate them. We have also observed in others (and ourselves!) that 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 so well?

We would likely 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 life challenging, we tend to communicate less. When the team is losing and it seems like more communication is needed, we also tend to communicate less.

Think of the times when you are at your worst as a communicator. Consider how the circumstances and emotions come into play. Are you able to stay present and focused? Likely, you're not. 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 level under these conditions. In the tough times it can be a challenge to be at our best. Yet, it is absolutely possible to communicate well in the rough times.

First we invite you to consider your attitude and perspective. One of the traits of Extraordinary communicators is that they are not just focused on the words they say but also, how the words *land*. Is your message that you intended the same one that gets received? In other words, in the communication process your success depends not only on the way you communicate, but also on how the receiver receives it.

Next, think about the attitude and perspective of the receiver in tough 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 unless we consciously decide otherwise.

Have a communication plan

Instead of being a victim of tough times or just wishing they didn't exist, acknowledge them, anticipate them, and decide to be even better during these times. That might mean being more aware, more present or consciously practicing good communication skills. What would it be like if you chose to be a better communicator when times are more challenging?

- 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. Several years ago when Kevin lost his job as a club manager, he had a friend that insisted on calling him once a week until Kevin told him to call less frequently. Instead of feeling isolated during a challenging time, his communication plan made Kevin feel connected and supported.
- 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? What do you want for the other person? If you can communicate your intention to people then they don't have to speculate what it might be. For example, 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 "hears".
- 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. Why are you really in the conversation?
- Keep the **main thing** the **main thing**. In tough times it is easy for the conversation to go astray. Their scan adds to the difficulties. Make sure you keep the focus and help the other(s) to do the same.
- **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 create better results.

- 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.

Decide to be an Extraordinary Communicator - especially in the tough times! If you are serious about elevating your own level of communication, print a copy of our Gift of Communication and work through the exercises. You can find it in the resource area of our site at www.thecoachingdept.com.