

Effective Communication Skills

One of most important skills for any Risk Manager is how to communicate with team members, vendors, leadership and peers. As individuals we might have great knowledge and experience to share within our organizations and the industry, but if we cannot communicate effectively, all this knowledge and experience is of little use. I found an article by Dave Willmer that is short, simple and communicated well on how to improve this skill set. He has outlined seven basic principles or guidelines that will help all of us in building our interpersonal skills. I hope you find them as helpful as I did.

Knowing how to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, is a critical aspect of success not only in the administrative field but in the overall business world as well. In fact, what you say and how you say it can make or break your image in the workplace.

Administrative professionals with strong interpersonal abilities are able to build rapport with colleagues. They know whose expertise to tap when they need assistance and are adept at resolving conflicts and building consensus among team members. Here are some ways to hone your communication skills:

- **Prepare.** Whether faced with speaking to an individual, a small group or making a presentation in front of hundreds, remember that preparation and practice are critical. The better prepared you are, the more confident and relaxed you'll feel and the less apprehensive you'll be.
- **Listen well.** Perhaps the most important and the most frequently overlooked communication skill is listening. Paying close attention to what the other person is saying requires discipline and practice. Doing so will help you avoid interrupting others and will assist you in welcoming differing perspectives.
- **Clarify your objectives and focus.** Know why you are talking with or writing to someone. What do you want to accomplish with your communication? Brevity is always appreciated in the fast-paced business world. Before you dial the phone or write an e-mail, take a moment to organize your thoughts so that your questions or statements are clear and concise.
- **Brush up on your writing.** Today's employers are searching for administrative professionals who write well. Consider enrolling in a business writing course. Make sure your documents flow, with transitions between paragraphs. Don't stray from your main points.

- **Proofread all written communications.** Spelling and grammar checkers are helpful tools but are no substitute for your own eyes. Review everything you write. Consider starting with the end of the document and reading paragraphs in reverse order. This will help you focus more on mechanics versus content. Choose your words carefully when e-mailing, since written messages can appear more severe than intended.
- **Know your audience.** To whom are you directing the message – your manager? A client? A colleague? The reason for the call or message, as well as the identity of the recipient, will help determine its content and style.
- **Repeat important information.** In voice-mail messages, always repeat your name and phone number as you conclude. When you're receiving instructions or complex information, reiterate what the other person said to prevent misunderstandings.

If you practice these skills on a continual basis, you will likely discover how your communication style may be enhanced for more professionalism, clarity and effectiveness.