



Book How To Say It for First-Time Managers

Winning Words and Strategies for Earning Your Team's Confidence

Jack Griffin
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Recommendation

Managers must be able to communicate with their employees. However, new supervisors generally do not get promoted on the basis of their communication skills. The executives who promote them assume, often mistakenly, that terrific salespeople or bookkeepers magically will become strong communicators. If newly appointed managers can't communicate their ideas, directions and instructions, the areas they supervise will fall apart. Jack Griffin's valuable book on communication for novice managers dictates what they need to say and how and when they need to say it. He suggests the best words to use and those to avoid, and even the body language inexperienced managers should adopt. *BooksInShort* finds this book insightful, informative and comprehensive, filled with useful tips and techniques that will benefit anyone who wants to communicate.

Take-Aways

- The words that managers use, and how they use them, have an effect on their employees – either positively or negatively.
- Managers who cannot communicate are in the wrong job.
- Managers must be fluent in the “language of business” in order to establish authority.
- They also must master the “language of leadership,” which requires a working knowledge of a verbal and nonverbal “leadership vocabulary.”
- Employees heed the nonverbal messages that managers communicate through body language.
- To communicate effectively with your employees, practice “active listening.”
- Make sure you have solid knowledge of the subjects you address.
- Speak clearly and cogently.
- Bring a positive attitude to everything you do and say.
- Ensure that meetings do not waste their employees' time.

Summary

You Can't Manage If You Can't Communicate

To manage people, you must be able to communicate. Effective communication depends on fluency in “the language of leadership,” a capability you can develop, starting with building a strong “leadership vocabulary” that is “both verbal and nonverbal.” Managers must be aware of the messages their facial expressions and physical gestures convey since people communicate as much with body language as with words.

“Effective leadership requires effective communication.”

Negative body language can sabotage a manager's efforts to direct, energize or motivate employees. Try to impart “a sense of relaxed energy.” Keep your eyes wide open during direct communications. Don't fidget or yawn. To signal your engagement, nod or lean forward as the other person speaks. Avoid the dreaded “dead-fish handshake,” but don't break the other person's hand, either. Don't rub your nose, ears or eyes – that signals doubt. Scratching your head signals confusion. Smile.

Do You Speak in Business Terms?

Leadership language helps new managers establish authority and credibility. Supervisors always should “speak the language of business,” which concerns money and time. Talk in terms of “money required” or “money made” and “time required” or “time saved.”

“Words explain, motivate, encourage, discourage, inspire, depress, demand, invite, guide, mislead, clarify, confuse, hearten and terrify.”

The top 10 touchstones in every manager’s day-to-day communication should be:

1. **"Accountability"** – It is important that no project begins without someone taking responsibility and accountability.
2. **"Collaborate"** – Teamwork is essential to business. It grows from collaboration.
3. **"Decisions"** – Managers make hard choices every day. That is the essence of business.
4. **"Ethics"** – Unethical businesspeople are headed for a fall.
5. **"Evaluate"** – Use your best judgment when making “value decisions.”
6. **"Excellence"** – Lead your employees to accomplish high-quality work.
7. **"Learn"** – Learning involves distilling knowledge from experience. Use “learn” instead of “find out” or “discover,” because such active usage sounds and works better.
8. **"Mission"** – A well-defined sense of purpose elevates a specific goal or objective.
9. **"Performance"** – Encourage others toward “continuous improvement.”
10. **"Quality"** – No business can succeed without a focus on excellence.

Are You a Good Listener?

Effective communication requires “active listening.” Managers are not dictators. They depend on dialogue to earn cooperation. To demonstrate attentive listening, respond to people with open body language. For instance, don’t put your hands across your chest or on your hips. Mirror the other person’s phrasing. For example, if an employee says, “I advised him to invest in a good desktop computer,” you could respond, “So you advised getting a desktop. Sounds like a good idea.”

“Every manager needs a useful, effective and productive vocabulary.”

Some other tips:

- **Tilt your head** – This signals engagement.
- **Don’t shake your head no** – This signals rejection.
- **Eye contact** – Stay focused on the person who is speaking.
- **Don’t lower your chin** – This signals defensiveness.
- **Pay attention to the other person’s breathing** – “Rapid breathing” suggests anxiety.

Your First Day on the Job

What you do as a new manager communicates as much as what you say. Proper preparation before your first day at work can have an impact on how effective you are as a manager. For instance, research your new company comprehensively. When you start working, don’t hide in your office. Walk around, greet people and get to know them. Ask what projects they are handling. Don’t change things right away. “Always speak from knowledge.” If you’re not sure what you’re talking about, don’t say anything.

“We have two ears and one mouth so that we may hear twice as much as we speak.” (Epictetus)

Carefully plan how you will conduct yourself during your first meeting with your staff. When you get up to speak, take three or four seconds to establish your presence. This implies confidence and self-assuredness. Plus, it gives your employees time to focus on you and what you will say. Don’t lock onto your notes. Establish eye contact with one person and then another. Then speak.

“Nothing speaks louder than insincerity and doubt.”

In one-on-one conversations, use words and phrases that establish rapport. After a staff member tells you about some negative situation, don’t say, “You have a real problem there.” Instead, say, “We have real problem here.” This signals that you and the staffer are on the same side.

Make Clarity Your Goal

Clarity in written and spoken communications depends on staying focused, speaking to the point and being transparent. When communicating information, reinforce the values you share with your employees so you can bond and prompt additional communication. When you request information, specify exactly what type you want, when and how you prefer to receive it. To provide instructions, use the “Five Ws” approach delineating “Who? What? When? Where?” and “Why?” Don’t micromanage how people do their jobs. Don’t make instructions long and cumbersome. Use a step-by-step format, based on a chronological outline. Write out all “rules, policies and procedures.” Detail the benefits that derive from any new rule.

“If the language of business is money, an important subdialect of that language is time.”

Managers must delegate work and support the people they direct. Some words and phrases encourage people and help them work more effectively. Consider using: “back you up,” discuss, determine, cope, benchmarks, reconsider and “own it.” Other words and phrases are discouraging and you should avoid using them, including: “foul up,” snafu, misguided, impossible, fault, catastrophe and incompetent. Do not delegate work by starting out with a pep talk.

“Move each of your work-related conversations from a monologue of I and you to a dialogue of we, us and our.”

Define your objectives and goals in this order:

- Spell out the overall goal.
- Explain its benefits.
- Discuss how the goal fits within your organization's big picture.
- List the objectives that employees must complete to reach the goal.
- Note the tasks that are necessary to attain the individual objectives.
- Delegate each task.
- Explain what each task involves and when it must be completed.

“Resist the urge to deliver monologues and to dominate conversations.”

Attach markers to each objective that help show that things are moving forward. Establish schedules. Be specific; for example, “We need to survey 10 clients by June 3.”

Coaching and Mentoring

Along with delegation and support, managers should provide coaching and mentoring. You need to know the difference between these bedrock management skills. Coaching concerns enhancing a particular skill. Managers often perform as coaches, articulating employees' goals and objectives, and listing their activities and duties. Mentoring involves a one-on-one arrangement in which you counsel a protégé, generally in the course of a long-term business relationship. Mentors provide their protégés with career and professional development guidance, share knowledge and experience, and help the protégés develop contacts and networks. The mentor serves as a valuable sounding board and meets with the protégé on a regular, preplanned basis. When you coach or mentor your staffers, encourage them to set ambitious goals they must work hard to achieve.

“Praise is a greater motivator than criticism. Don't just give praise, tell a story.”

Supportive words a coach might use include: reset, overcome, self-starter and “retry.” Destructive phrases to avoid include: “don't rock the boat,” “follow orders,” boss and punish.

No One Likes Negativity

Managers need to be consistently optimistic. This does not mean ignoring problems or misleading anyone. It suggests that you should be hopeful and upbeat. After you delegate a job, cheer on your workforce. Accentuate the positive. Use these words and phrases: “challenge” (not “problem”), “feedback” (not “criticism”) and “investment” (not “cost”). Begin each feedback session by referring to any positive staff achievement you can cite. Express your appreciation and admiration for other people, not your criticism and concern. Do not assume that an employee understands everything you say. Ask, “Am I being clear, and do you have any questions?” Good managers inspire and motivate. Your language will build morale or tear it down. Do not focus on impractical goals; instead, enable good work and encourage your staffers. Be enthusiastic. Don't gloss over problems or obstacles – acknowledge them. Then confidently propose solutions.

“Set...unambiguous benchmarks – goals clearly defined, along with objectives required to reach them.”

Management is not just about leading people you like; it also involves dealing with difficult staffers, like these:

- **“The bully”** – Communicate with bullies via email rather than face to face to keep emotions at bay. Avoid instant messaging, as quick responses can become heated.
- **“The passive-aggressive employee”** – Mr. or Ms. Unreliability. This type of person is likely to say, “Don't worry” about a job that needs completion. Monitor this staffer's work constantly. Don't try to psychoanalyze. Just aim for improved behavior.
- **“The chronic complainer”** – Ignore their complaints as long as they get the job done. Act if they are unproductive. Don't engage. Stay on message: The job must get done.
- **“Verbal abusers”** – Do not tolerate abusive behavior for an instant. Avoid scolding. Defuse his or her anger by injecting yourself and “stemming the flow of words.”

“If you want to deliver inspiration in a medium more powerful than an email, make a speech.”

Most people like to say yes, but managers often must say no, particularly to the problem employees described above.

Follow these guidelines when you cannot avoid saying no:

- Speak clearly and distinctly. Don't be a mealy-mouth. Don't deal in false hopes.
- Explain your negative response.
- Have alternatives ready. Shift the conversation from what will not work to what will.
- Be methodical when saying no. Try to say yes to some portion of the request.

“If you aren't naturally enthusiastic, become enthusiastic.”

No one is perfect. Sooner or later, you will screw up. When you do, accept responsibility in front of your employees, your boss, whomever. Don't go overboard with a tearful, emotion-laden mea culpa. Be objective and frank as you assess the consequences of your mistake. Be ready with a corrective remedy. Don't ever try to pass the buck.

Meetings

Have a clear agenda for every meeting. Without preplanning, your meetings will waste time. An agenda must include a stated purpose for the meeting and a list of issues to discuss. Avoid open-ended meetings, which wreck your employees' schedules. Know in advance how much time you want to spend on each segment of your meeting. Don't include more people in a meeting than you need to have. If you are holding an informative meeting, have no more than 30 staffers. If the meeting is intended to identify problems, include no more than a dozen. Meetings to solve problems call for five or fewer participants. Meetings to motivate people or respond to a crisis should include as many participants as you can fit into a room. Business meetings should feature an "unambiguous call to action"; for example, "X, Y and Z will be implemented immediately."

"Speak the language of business whenever you can."

Use this basic plan for all brainstorming meetings:

- Define the subject or issue of the meeting.
- Request ideas. You want as many as possible. No editorial comments. Accept each idea as potentially viable no matter how far-fetched.
- Have someone write each idea for display so everyone can see them.
- Evaluate the ideas. Filter through to find the best ones and discard the rest.
- Examine these ideas in detail during subsequent meetings.

About the Author

Jack Griffin wrote *How to Say It at Work* and *How to Say It Best*.
