

## **Excellent communication with our business partners!**

Throughout my career of over 18 years in the International Corporate Business Environment, it has never done me any harm to observe the communication and as an outcome of this, the behavior in the boardroom. As a matter of fact, I have learned a lot from it and it has made me more alert about the importance of good communication, be it with men or women...

We could even take it one step further; not only the difference between men and women play a role in today's business environment, also the diversity of cultures within one company, make our daily conversations with colleagues and stakeholders more interesting and at times more challenging.

## **How can we influence and persuade our business partners?**

We have at our disposal two amazing tools: Our verbal and non-verbal communication

People cannot read our mind or intentions, they can only see our behavior; the things we say and the things we do.

We are always communicating, whether we realise it or not. What we say, the way we stand or sit, the way we look, or don't look at people. Everything carries 'messages' that customers pick up and respond to.

The words we use are important, but perhaps more important are the 'messages' we send in ways other than through our words. Research suggests that around 93% of the messages in face-to-face communication are carried in ways other than words, i.e. via our tone of voice, our facial expression, our body posture, etc. (Albert Mehrabian – American Psychologist)

Recent research has shown us that women are generally slightly quicker in making their first impression. This has to do with how our brains are programmed since millions of years and the fact that we had and have to make quicker decisions than men (fight or flight).

## **Do we need different communication styles with men or women?**

When it comes to the meeting environment, some of the main differences in communication and behavior between men and women seem to be that:

- Men prefer a hierarchical structure where one person is in charge. Women like a flat structure with lots of brainstorming
- When men are meeting; the focus is on the target: 'what do we need to achieve'? Women are often focused on the process (how do we get there) as well as on the target

I have noticed that as women make decisions, they tend to think of options out loud while men on the contrary, process internally until they come up with a solution. This can lead to problems because the male thinks that the female's verbal brainstorming means that she's looking for approval rather than just thinking aloud.

### **Do people listen to what you have to say?**

The first rule of successful communication is to know that the pre-dominant thought of every human being on this planet is:

**what's in it for me?**

All the time, this is the single most important understanding, whenever you communicate to people! Whether it is men or women?

If you want to be successful you have to understand the other person's agenda and respect their immediate needs first, before thinking about achieving your objectives.

Why?

Because what interests people more than anything else is fulfilling their own needs. They will only actively listen to you and *hear* you if their needs are met.

### **How can you ensure that people listen to you?**

You can communicate in such a way that it becomes clear that there is "something in it for the person that listens to you to keep focused and give you all their attention"!

Simply by putting yourself in the shoes of the other person and by asking questions that are purely related to them and what's on their agenda, you will gain respect and trust.

Through active listening you will be well on my way! Keep in mind what it is exactly they want and why. And integrate this information into the further conversation.

**This approach works very well in various situations, such as:**

- when leading your team through a period of change
- during a meeting; to sell a new idea or concept
- during performance reviews or evaluations with your team
- during strategic conversations

### **Is it possible to adapt our communication style to persuade stakeholders?**

I would personally say 'yes' as I have seen many women and men evolve and grow in their careers once they start to further optimize and develop their communication and influencing skills...

**Communication Strategies that lead to success!**

1. Project a Powerful image
2. Verbally communicate in a clear, concise way; simplicity is the key to successful communication
3. Feel good about yourself, don't compare yourself with male colleagues (or female colleagues for that matter) but look at what difference you bring to the business and aim to constantly improve yourself
4. Know your Unique Selling Points and communicate them effectively
5. Use skills that you are brilliant at and build on these skills!

Skills that will help you achieve this;

- Speaking confidently with words that are assertive and direct – **using a confident tone of voice and volume**
- Eliminate fillers such as 'maybe', or 'sort of', and 'probably', as they dilute the message and will lower your credibility. **There is nothing like a silence to punctuate your point!**
- **Ask for feedback** and be brave enough to carry out a 360° feedback at least every two years. This will help you to understand how you are perceived by your manager, your peers and your team. And only if you know, you can do something about it.

Everyone can increase their personal effectiveness through excellent communication; it is only a matter of choice!

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