



Communicating Your Value

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Which is more important—having a great idea or being able to communicate your great idea? Building a great product or being able to sell your product? Making valuable contributions or gaining unpretentious exposure for your contributions? Being an engineering manager with deep engineering expertise or having the ability to rally your team behind a new development initiative? Having great ideas, expertise, products, and contributions are tremendous assets, but aren't sufficient on their own. Successful people also have the ability to sell their value-adding capabilities. They augment their domain skills, knowledge, and efforts with the ability to effectively communicate them. They are able to build relationships, gain buy in, and convey their value in a compelling way.

Many people have a poor mental image of sales people and for good reason. The stereotypical sales person of years past was pushy, arrogant, and deceitful. Thankfully, most organizations have realized that approach is ineffective. Successful sales people now are trustworthy, likable, and value focused. To represent the difference, many organizations no longer refer to sales as sales but rather as business development, account management, project sponsorship, and other terms. Naming, however, doesn't change the underlying nature of the role. Neither does it change who carries the responsibility. Everyone sells. Selling is not limited to people who talk with external customers. Everyone has ideas, capabilities, content, products, and/or services that help others and therefore merit being communicated effectively.

You may not consider yourself a sales person, but if you and your organization expect to be successful, consider sales a critical core competency to have. Like it or not, having great ideas, building great products, and making great contributions are critical, but insufficient. If you can't communicate your value in a trustworthy and compelling manner, your ideas won't be embraced, your products won't be bought, and your contributions will go unrecognized.

Selling is fundamentally the ability to influence others through interpersonal communication skills. It is a trait of not only great sales people but also effective leaders and others who reach the top of their profession including top performing engineers, product managers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, artists, authors, recruiters, consultants, and project managers.

To ensure you and your team gain the most from the value you provide, follow these seven principles of effective communications and in particular the ability to influence others:

- 1. Likeability** – Companies don't buy products and services; people do. Whatever you are selling, you are selling it to people who prefer to do business with and work with people they like. Be someone that others enjoy being around by conveying a positive attitude, having a humble nature, and not taking yourself too seriously.
- 2. Trustworthiness** – You can be fun to be around, but if you aren't trustworthy, your message, offerings, and capabilities won't be trusted either. For people to embrace and invest in you, you must be trustworthy. Ensure you are honest, have honorable motives, follow through on your commitments, and care for others as much as you care yourself.
- 3. Competence** – You can be likable, caring, and honest, but if you aren't competent, you can't be depended on. Good intentions are only a start. Build your skills and expertise. Gain knowledge and experience in every facet of your domain. Build your communication skills. Take on challenging assignments and look for opportunities to learn through adversity.



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4. **Understanding** – The ability to influence involves listening as much as speaking and doing. Effective communicators ask questions and listen. They uncover other people’s needs and wants. Seek to understand before being understood. As important as having a compelling value proposition is having thought provoking questions to ask that generate meaningful dialog.
5. **Differentiation** – Standard offerings and simple ideas don’t make it very far in our advanced contemporary society. People expect customized and targeted solutions for their particular needs. Differentiate yourself by focusing on how you uniquely accommodate other’s requirements. Emphasize the value that you add, not merely the features you offer or work you perform.
6. **Content** – When you create your message, ensure your content is compelling. Rise above industry norms. Move beyond mundane ideas and trite updates. Include counterintuitive if not provocative points of view in your message. Demonstrate your thought leadership. To state the obvious, ensure your content is factual, professional, and high quality.
7. **Delivery** – Not only do you need great content, but you must be engaging in your delivery of it. Start with the “why” of your message. Ensure the impact of the problem you are solving and/or the opportunity you are leveraging is clear. Bring your points to life by replacing PowerPoint charts with visual aids, stories, examples, metaphors, multimedia, and whiteboards.

Follow these principles and enjoy the success that comes with the ability to communicate effectively.

The content in this article is adapted from Book 3 of the SCOPE of Leadership book series by Mike Hawkins – *Communications: Inspiring Performance*.

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