

Communications and interpersonal skills

1 Communications

" Through active listening and questioning I quickly identify relevant issues/information and develop good working relationships with colleagues/clients. Through this process I can provide informative feedback . I have consistently negotiated favourable outcomes with both internal and external clients and communicate issues effectively with team members seeking confirmation as required. I articulate issues clearly and succinctly to facilitate clear understanding. In my current role I provide a source of safety expertise to my clients, consulting and liaising with all levels of personnel and reporting directly to senior management. This has included preparing audit reports and giving written and oral presentations on developing improved safety management systems.

From the my studies of Management of Organisational Change I adopt a communications and management philosophy that "People Support What They Create"

While with B.H.P. I worked with Professor T.J. Larkin of Harvard University analysing safety communications in the company. There were 3 main messages to come out of this research-

Use face-to-face communications,

Use the supervisor to communicate and

Frame messages relevant to the immediate work area.

With written communications I aim to be succinct, have an appropriate structure and utilise management summaries with major reports. I use photographs, diagrams, flow-charts etc. to illustrate main points. Important written communications must always be followed up by a face-to-face meeting. The BHP guideline for general correspondence is that if it takes more than 2 pages to write it is too much for busy people to write and read. The world of safety is famous for well-meaning, ponderous, glossy publications that no one really knows about, cares about or uses. Safety communications are also famous for the use of "weasel-words". "Weasel-words" promise a lot but deliver little.

Action and Experiential learning models must be used for communicating learning as opposed to lecture style presentations.

Professor T.J. Larkin says "If it is not face-to-face it is not communication".

. Some examples of written competencies include:

- ❖ Minor and major reports and submissions with organisations such as BHP,T.A.F.E., Caloundra City Council and Ergon Energy;
- ❖ Developing an array of Safe *Working Procedures* manuals and procedural instructions documents;
- ❖ Succinct and informative memorandums;
- ❖ Detailed Audit Reports for major organisations;
- ❖ A variety of training and development reports;
- ❖ Comprehensive accident investigations;

- ❖ Academic Papers (in the last two years I have had a number of papers about Occupational Health and Safety and Training and Development published in Australia and the USA(refer to web-site ohschange.com.au)

2 Interpersonal

A feature of my experience has been to develop excellent working relationships with people ranging from senior management through to project team members. Some examples of my time with one employer include:

- ❖ Being adopted as the public face of safety change through the numerous safety courses I conducted for all levels of personnel;
- ❖ As an internal OHS consultant selling my services to an often critical and cost-conscious audience;
- ❖ Being retained by the Brisbane Safety Department as their OHS consultant of choice for operating sites while with the Brisbane office;
- ❖ Representing the company on State Union Safety Forums and negotiating safety agreements as part of enterprise bargaining (State Union officials used to approach me to head off safety issues becoming industrial problems);
- ❖ Representing the company on employer associations and regulatory bodies, OHS working parties.

From the my studies of Management of Organisational Change I adopt a communications and management philosophy that “People Support What They Create” Lots of communication, discussion and identification of needs will give you the buy in you need. Understanding the situation from the perspective of the other person is essential. as is knowing “What’s in it for me” from the perspective of the other person. A bit of humour never goes astray.AND please get to the point and do not give excessive detail. Focus on the benefits of initiatives to the other person.

The following 2 techniques are invaluable-

Appropriate Self-Disclosure

I was introduced to and practised appropriate self-disclosure in a Psychology subject. You will find in a new relationship if you reveal a little bit of you (provided it is appropriate)the other party will reveal a little bit of them(provided it is appropriate), if you then reveal a little bit more of you(provided it is appropriate) they will reveal a little bit more of them (provided it is appropriate), and so the cycle goes on. This is very simple, incredibly effective and I use it all the time to build relationships. Of course if you really hang all your dirty washing out it will probably stuff up the process.

Reflective Listening

On a counselling subject I was introduced to and practised reflective listening. This is a very powerful technique to get to the core beliefs of those around you. Someone says something, you may say “If I understand you properly you think x” ,this gives the other party the opportunity to expand on their view or “Correct me if I am wrong but I think you are saying y” I suggest all safety professionals read up on this technique, it can make your life much easier.