

Communicating Around the Team Table

--Marcia Hughes and James Terrell



Ask any team what they need to improve most and they are like to say “Communications!” And they are right. Any team that communicates well has the foundational tools to respond well to stress, conflict, changes and to have a positive mood. So there’s a lot in it for you as a team leader or team member to improve team communications. Fortunately, this can be done. Remember all those phrases like an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, or a stitch in time saves nine. Apply this tested savvy to teams and you know it’s time to improve how you speak and listen to one another. This is one of the seven competencies in the Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Survey® (TESI®), described in our book *The Emotionally Intelligent Team*. But if communication is so important why is it often such a failure? Frankly, it’s not a complex answer. The skills needed have not been taught, fostered and insisted upon; mediocrity is too often accepted. Let’s start with noting the key parts to good communication.

Communication is what team members do to connect with others so that they can understand the collection of goals that are being pursued and how well each team member is proceeding in the attempt to satisfy his/her needs. Communication consists of the following ingredients as identified in *The Emotionally Intelligent Team*:

- Sender: the person who transmits the information
- Receiver: the person to whom the information is transmitted
- Message: the information transmitted
- Meaning: the intent of the message
- Feeling: adds depth to the message
- Technique: how the message is communicated

Communication is how people interact with each other so they can satisfy their needs and desires to make life better. To communicate, one person (the sender) must transmit information to someone else (the receiver). This message can go to the whole team or to one person, but there has to be an effective exchange of a message or there is no communication. For example, if a team member speaks about an issue, and another team member later believes he or she never heard of the topic, communication did not occur.



For effective communication to occur, the sender's meaning must also be clearly understood by the receiver. Meaning is conveyed by both verbal and nonverbal communication. If the sender's words are encouraging but he or she is looking down when speaking, the message and meaning are mixed. Nonverbal communication is likely to convey more of the truth, so it is important that the sender's verbal and nonverbal messages are congruent in order for the meaning to be accurately understood.

All communication has meaning, from the trivial – “Please post a notice of our meeting” – to that of huge consequence – “The building is on fire!” The feeling component adds even more depth to the meaning.

Finally, technique is critical for effective communication. Without the awareness and implementation of effective techniques, the message, meaning, and feeling in the communication is lost. The following exercises will help build team communication. We have provided many tips and exercises for working with team communications in our *Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Facilitator's Guide – TESI® Short*. Strengthening communication requires paying attention to the learning styles and preferences of the intended recipients and presenting the information accordingly. It requires patience which leads to slowing down enough to check in and see if you are understood. Most of all effective communication is highly rewarding, even if you slow down you get things done faster because when the sender and receiver are communicating the results are sustainable.