

RICK'S TIPS

***Rick's Tips* explores the competencies necessary for successful leadership and provides activities to assist with the development and mastery of these skills.**

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THE IMPACT OF WORDS

“Good words are worth much and cost little.”
– George Herbert

My grandma used to say, “Keep your words soft and sweet because you never know which ones you’ll have to eat.” Grandmas are so smart.

Some people heed this advice; others choose to ignore it. Some people think through what they say; others NEVER think about what they say.

History is littered with examples of ignorance regarding the impact of words. In today’s era of political correctness (ironically ignored by most politicians), it is even more important to understand that words have meaning and consequence.

We don’t always say the right things in the right way. If we thought more about “what” we were saying and “how” we were saying it, our communications would be more effective.

In your next exchange, try to assess the effectiveness of your communication style. Are you as good as you think you are? Effective communication is both an art and a science.

5 STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

SPEAK FROM OBSERVATION, NOT JUDGMENT

The minute we come across as though we are passing judgment, we have alienated the person we are interacting with and put them on the defensive. The person will want to protect themselves and an argument could begin. Communication has stopped. **Next time:** consider your communication style prior to responding. Pay attention to your words, your delivery and your intent. If you have the opportunity, practice your response with an objective outsider. Make sure you speak from observation and not come across as though you are passing judgment. Restate facts, offer additional information, but do not offer your opinion.

CRITIQUE WITHOUT BEING CRITICAL

When we are critical of others, we can come across as condescending. Critiquing is the art of providing constructive criticism in such a way that helps the other person see where and how improvements can be made. It is easy for our conversation and words to turn critical. This is especially true if we are frustrated, upset, emotional or angry. This will result in our true intentions being lost and we will close down any opportunity to have our message heard. **Next time:** before offering a critique, ask yourself the following questions... Is my suggestion constructive and can it result in a positive outcome? Am I phrasing it in a way that does not make the person feel inadequate? Did they ask for my opinion?

DISCUSS ALTERNATIVES VS. ARGUE

Everyone has an opinion. The more domineering our personality, the more likely we will get into arguments centered around our opinions, especially if we feel our position is being threatened. Before you challenge, ask yourself, "Is it worth it?" No one should be a doormat, but not every situation is a call to arms. Pick your battles carefully. There are people who like to argue; focusing only on a win-lose outcome. The more we strive for a "win-win," the more open we are to exploring alternatives and the discovery of common ground. This inclusive style of communication is more likely to result in an amiable outcome and avoids unnecessary conflict, animosity or hurt feelings. **Next time:** prior to offering your opinion, play "devil's advocate". Explore at least two alternatives to the one being considered. Encourage others to do the same resulting in several alternative options being considered.

SPEAK FROM LOGIC, NOT EMOTION

Being able to function under stress and pressure is one of the most critical components of leadership. Regardless of how positive the environment, there will always be situations that go wrong. The reaction to such situations says much about a leader. Remaining logical, level-headed and cool under fire will enable you to speak from logic rather than emotion. When we become emotional about an issue, we interject our own personal agenda and feelings about the subject and allow "emotion to rule the day". This emotional reaction detracts from our meaning and intent. Our voice elevates, our words have a bite, and our demeanor and tone tend to change, not always in a positive direction. It becomes impossible to remain rational when we are emotional. **Next time:** remember to move emotions to data, taking personal feelings and agendas out of the equation. Look at the facts surrounding the situation. Just because "you feel" the decision or conclusion is best doesn't make it so.

LISTEN BEFORE COMMUNICATING

A child being scolded by a parent is only listening for the moment when the parent takes a breath, so he can say “yeah, but...” and defend his position, not to what the parent is actually saying. Unfortunately, this behavior is not limited to children. Most of us think we listen, but more often than not, it’s waiting for the opportunity to be heard. Listening requires an active intent to pay attention to not only the words, but the feelings and emotions behind the words. Learn to listen with the intention of understanding rather than criticizing, judging or disputing. Learn to listen with the goal of discovering the validity or truth of the matter. Learn to listen for understanding about a different point of view. Listening is an art form. Those more intent on hearing themselves talk will never learn to listen. **Next time:** think through and repeat the statements being made to you. Ask for clarification on any points you don’t understand. Do not respond until you are certain of the message and its intent. Hear your response in your head before you speak it. Try to incorporate the previous points before you offer a response. Words have power and with power comes responsibility. So, for effective communication, speak responsibly!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Political Savvy: Systemic Approaches to Leadership Behind the Scenes](#) by Joel R. Deluca

[Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High](#) by Kerry Peterson

[Verbal Judo: The Gentle Art of Persuasion](#) by George J. Thompson and Jerry B. Jenkins

[Business of Listening](#) by Diana Bonet (a Crisp Learning Series)

[Nobody’s Perfect: How to Give Criticism and Get Results](#) by Hedrie Weisinger & Norman M. Lobsenz

“Be sure to taste your words before you spit them out.”

– Anonymous