

“Meeting Postponed, Sorry for the Incontinence” Preventing This, and Other Miscommunications, in the Workplace

Remember the game “telephone”? A group of children sit in a circle; the first child picks a phrase (e.g. “mittens and snowshoes”) and whispers it into the ear of the next child. The process is continued until it reaches the last person in the circle who says the phrase out loud. Due to miscommunication or mischievousness, the resulting phrase is usually transformed into something along the lines of “my aunt’s glow moustache”.

A similar process happens in the workplace everyday. In small and large organizations, important information is passed through a chain of command either verbally or in writing. Imagine the following scenario: Andrew has recently been promoted to director of a company division. He is ambitious and eager to do a good job. He attends his first weekend strategy meeting for the executives where some key ideas are discussed regarding the direction the company intends to take over the next year. He is excited about the ideas discussed and he feels that he and his department can take the lead. The intention was to have all the executives mull over the strategy and propose suggestions to



meet targets over the course of the next few months. Andrew fires off an email to his staff late Saturday night after the close of the day’s meeting, announcing changes in his department. The email was short, taken directly out of his notes from the meeting, and read as follows:

“Aggressive measures need to be taken to lower costs immediately, and our department, like many others will be affected. Expect some major changes, and start finding ways immediately to lower costs and show your value to the organization.”

Andrew's intention was to have his employees begin thinking about ways to limit their expenses. By the time he returns from the weekend meeting on the following Tuesday, the office is rife with worry, rumors and stress, as many interpreted the email to mean that people were going to lose their jobs. Andrew had not paid attention to, or simply didn't realize, the nuances of the language he used and how it could be interpreted when taken out of context.

Effective communication can be a complex matter that requires diligence and practice. It encompasses the ability to speak clearly and concisely, a capacity for social insight and empathy, assertiveness, and self-monitoring, along with the often

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overlooked and undervalued skill of listening. And while a large vocabulary is useful if you're in a spelling bee, it's worthless if most of what you communicate to others goes right over their head. Moreover, while English may be the common language in your business, you likely employ a diverse group of people from different cultural, social or educational backgrounds. This requires the ability to adapt one's communication skills to various social contexts.

So here are a few simple communication tips to keep in mind:

- ❖ Avoid using cumbersome verbiage – i.e. small words work just fine.
- ❖ Always consider your audience and use terminology and analogies appropriate to them.
- ❖ Avoid using idioms and clichés (OMG!) – not everyone understands them.
- ❖ Consider the context in which something is being said, and ensure that comments are not taken out of context.
- ❖ Whenever possible, provide the opportunity for clarification. Encourage questions and ask listeners to rephrase a complex message in their own words.

It's easy to see how communication is much more complex than stringing a few words together. It's an interplay of thinking processes, verbal and non-verbal interaction, and emotional intelligence.

Fortunately, PsychTests can help bring these skills together harmoniously with the aid of several assessments. The **COMSA - R2 (Communication Skills Assessment)** evaluates basic communication ability, while **SPSA (Social Personality and Skills Assessment)** delves into more complex interpersonal capacities like empathy, social insight, and conflict resolution. Emotional intelligence, measured with PsychTests' **MEIQ (Multi-dimensional Emotional Intelligence Quotient)**, has also become an important buzzword in business circles, and has been argued to be the missing link in personal and professional success. 🌀

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