

# Communicating Your Ideas

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## *The human side — A Dale Carnegie® Feature*

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Don Murray was furious. "I explained in detail how to do that job. He told me he understood and now he messed it all up. It has to be done all over again."

How often has this happened to you? You give detailed instructions to a subordinate, explain a concept to an associate, describe a procedure to a customer — leave feeling that it is clearly understood and later find out it was not understood at all. Many problems could be avoided and much time saved if only we could be assured that what we communicate is received by the other party in a way we expected it would.

When Don gave his subordinate those detailed instructions, what question do you think he asked when he completed his statement? You guessed right. He asked "Do you understand?" And what do you think the subordinate answered? Again you're right. He surely said "Yes, I do." Just because somebody says he or she understands does not mean they really do understand. Some people only think they understand what has been told to them and of course, they respond that they do understand. However, because their interpretation is different from that of the person giving the information, there was no real understanding at all.

Other people understand part of what has been communicated and assume they understand all of it. Still others do not understand it at all but are too embarrassed to tell their boss that they do not understand so they say they do and try to figure it out for themselves. In any of these situations, no real commun-

ication has been accomplished and it is likely that errors will be made, misconceptions will develop and time will be wasted, tempers lost and work will not be accomplished.

How do good communicators get their ideas across? We asked office managers, factory supervisors, sales managers and other administrative executives for some of their approaches.

Betty Michaels, office manager of a travel agency in New York City, reports that she never asks the employee if he or she understands the instructions. Instead, she asks the subordinate to tell her what he or she is going to do. "I give them a quiz," Mrs. Michaels told us. "If I give a clerk a project to complete, after I explain it, I ask her just what she is going to do. In case there is a different interpretation from what I had in mind, we can correct it on the spot before it becomes a problem. If the project is a complex one, I ask a variety of questions such as: 'What will you do if X happens?' and 'Suppose Y develops?'"

Mrs. Michaels has among her responsibilities, teaching the clerical staff how to operate the computers used in making reservations and purchasing and issuing airline tickets. She commented: "To be sure that I can depend on the clerk to operate that computer correctly, in addition to asking them questions, I have them show me on the computer just how they will handle a variety of problems. By having them actually work the computer, I can see for myself how much they have learned and mastered."

Tony San Filippo uses the same

approach in communicating with his workers at the Quantum Electronics plant. To assure they fully understand his instructions he breaks the job down into phases and he has the workers show him how they will perform each phase before he explains the next phase to them. "In this way," San Filippo reports, "I know they understand and I have very few problems in communication."

Dr. Kim Park, chief engineer of a high tech R&D facility in Austin, Texas, adds another caution. "My people are all professionals — well educated and trained in their technical areas. They tend to rush ahead of me and anticipate what I will say. Often they are right, but there are times when they turn me off because they assume they know what I want done before I complete my comments. To overcome this I watch their nonverbal language carefully — their eyes, their facial expressions, their body language. If it appears that they are no longer listening, I stop talking for a few seconds and after a pause ask them a specific question on what I said. This brings them back on the track."

Understanding what is communicated is a basic criterion for good communication, but there is another factor which is equally important. What is communicated must not only be understood, it must be accepted by the other party. The manager tells a clerk that this assignment must be completed by 3 o'clock this afternoon. There is no doubt that the clerk knows exactly what is meant, but she says to herself "no way." Do you think the job will be completed by 3? Not likely. Unless the person doing the job feels it is reasonable and attainable, he or she will not put forth the effort to meet that time limit.

Louise Rhodes, who owns and manages Featherdusters, a janitorial service in Rock Hill, South Carolina, handles situations like this by obtaining the participation of her workers. Usually there is a team of men and women involved in the project. She brings them together and first tells them what is required and the reason for the time pressure. She then asks them when they think it can be done and what other suggestions they may have. Often they come up with solutions that are even better than might have been determined solely by management, but from time to time, Mrs.

Rhodes learns from these meetings that overtime or extra help is needed and that her original estimate of time was overly optimistic. Because her people know she encourages their participation and listens to them, she gets more cooperation from them in the tough situations when extra effort, energy and commitment are needed.

Communication is not a one-way street: the communicator giving a message to another party. To be effective it must be a two-way highway with feedback flowing from one party to the other on a continuous basis. The sender of the message must seek and receive feedback from the receiver. The communicator must be always assured that what is sent is understood and accepted by the receiver. To accomplish this, the sender must ask questions, observe what is observable and, if there are misunder-

standings, correct them and assure that the corrections are understood. He or she must seek the acceptance of the communication by the receiver so that there will be a sincere willingness to accomplish what is desired.

By following these fundamentals of good communication, not only will your messages get across more readily but work will be accomplished with fewer errors and on time, your people will be more efficient and happier and you will be able to do your job as a manager with fewer problems and more satisfaction.



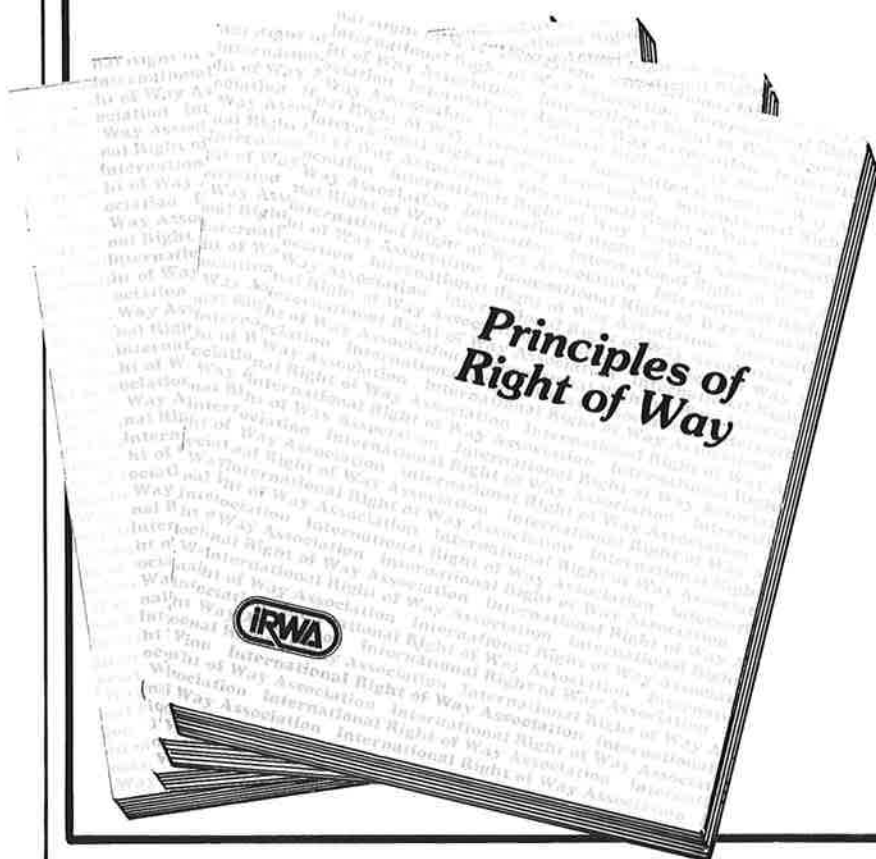
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