



# Listening skills part of effective communication

Good communication is as much about listening and presentation as it is about imparting knowledge. This is according to Madge Gibson, a senior associate at Jack Hammer Executive Headhunters.

“Despite the seniority of candidates that we deal with in the head-hunting sphere, clients still find it necessary to request ‘strong communication skills’ as a key requirement when we undertake a search. At first glance this may seem a redundant request – after all, surely good communication skills go hand-in-hand with a certain level of professionalism and experience? Not so! And the corporate world is well aware of this,” she says.

“All too often, managers believe that communication is about talking to their staff, customers and stakeholders, the ability to speak to an audience without faltering, or the creation of a well-worded PowerPoint presentation. Yet a good communicator is someone who listens and invites the participation of others, promoting genuine dialogue, and who values what other people have to say. We've been given two ears and one mouth – for a reason” she says.

## “Succinct, clear, relevant and to the point”

“And when you do have something to say,” she adds, “make sure that it is succinct, clear, relevant and to the point. The fact that you can ‘speak the hind leg off a donkey’ on any subject is not a skill, and most definitely not a ‘communication’ skill. Talking ‘at’ someone and not picking up on their lack of understanding or receptiveness is a big failing in many executives. Some people just like the sound of their own voices. A good communicator actively reads his audience and knows when to shut up”.

A hugely underestimated area of communication is presentation through body language. Experts say that only 7% of what you communicate is through the words you choose; over 50% of communication is conveyed through body language – posture, eye contact, facial expression, body movement, gestures etc while the balance is a function of how you speak – tone of voice, volume, projection, emphasis and expression.

“People often place more control on the content of their speech than their body language, yet it's body language that speaks the loudest. For example, how often have you seen a nervous person trying to be assertive and failing dismally? The words may be correct but the associated posture or fidgeting will give the game away and no one will take them seriously”.

## “Combination valued”

“Getting the combination of body, verbal and listening skills right is no easy task and hence the reason why it is so valued in the corporate world. Someone possessing these skills will be a far more successful executive and manager.

“It's worth investing in management communication training or the services of a professional coach to upskill in these areas. After all, a message or idea that is clearly communicated and well understood stands a greater chance of being successfully implemented,” Gibson concludes.

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