



COMMUNICATION WILL **MATTER** THIS **SEASON**

ACTUALLY EVERY SEASON

Communication. Communication. Communication. It is the KEY to success in life in every aspect in life, and yet we all struggle with it in varying degrees. Communication is so important because it is the vehicle for information and information is needed to make decisions each and every day.

As busy season approaches, I cannot stress the importance of effective communication between you, your team, your clients and your family. Transparent communication will help establish accurate expectations; it will prevent major issues and will help everyone understand what is needed in order to be successful.

Listening to Understand

A BIG part of communicating is actually listening. So often, this part of the equation is overlooked. We tend to be so intent on getting our ideas heard that we steamroll over those who we are talking with and we aren't hearing them. If we want to be heard, surely we should be doing some listening as well?!

The truth is, we all want to be heard...especially your team and your clients. Being heard requires someone to actually listen. Listening requires putting our own agendas aside and prioritizing the person in front of us. Really listening to your colleagues and clients this busy season will make your life SO much better. Why? People will feel heard, validated, and as a result they will feel positively toward you, which will make your stress decrease significantly.

Of course improvisation comes in handy here, because the key to improv is being able to listen in order to understand. When you're not listening to those around you, how can you respond in a way that truly adds value to the interaction? It's the same no matter the situation, a client meeting, speaking with your spouse, or meeting someone new - in each of these interactions we have a choice in how we're going to engage. When you stop yourself from acting on your knee-jerk reactions/responses/ideas and instead listen and wait to respond, you'll find that not only does the person you're talking with feel validated, you'll have a relevant response. Also, being thoughtful about what someone is telling you and how you choose to respond will inevitably help you when challenging topics are brought up.

How to Communicate When Things Go Wrong

Challenges will inevitably occur at some point during the next several months. Perhaps there will be a mistake made by you, your team or even the client(s) you work with. The way you choose to respond to your team and client regarding the problem will dictate how well you all will bounce back from the experience.

This concept is repeatedly seen in sports every year; when key players aren't able to make the play when they need to, or when one poor decision costs the trajectory of the game. There are so many examples of this, that no matter your sport, team, game of choice, you will find lessons in learning how to respond and bounce back.

This, I believe, must be one of the hardest aspects of being a coach. Sure, finding talent, training them to succeed and making sure they're game-ready is a significant part of the job - but, think about aspect of the job where you have to keep spirits up and encourage motivation despite setbacks and discouragement. In those moments, coaches set the tone and have the power to help the team move on and do better things. Sure, there are learning experiences, and yes those need to be reviewed and understood...but, how you engage with your team and clients will determine your success ahead.

A recent example of this was illustrated in an Inc. article on the heels of a bizarre NFL football between the Seattle Seahawks and the Arizona Cardinals. The game was the lowest tied score in NFL history - hardly anything happened offensively (only two field goals for each team, adding up to six points each). Then in overtime, BOTH kickers missed relatively "easy" kicks. Therefore, the player whose job it was to come and make the play, didn't - not in last play of the game that would win it.

As the Inc. article pointed out, the response of the two coaches was extremely different. As quoted from article here was the Cardinals coach's response: "Make it. This is professional, this ain't high school, baby. You get paid to make it." Versus the response from Seahawks head coach: "[Hauschka] made his kicks to give us a chance and unfortunately he didn't make the last one. He's been making kicks for years around here ... but he's gonna hit a lot of winners as we go down the road here. I love him and he's our guy."

Night and day. Think about how this would make you feel if you were the kicker for your respective team...or the accountant on the team that made an error. You already feel awful; does it help to hear your boss or co-worker rip into you even more? Nope. In fact, hearing that negativity could result in more second-guessing and mistakes. Make sure you seek to use your communication to inform, inspire and empower. One way to do this? "Yes, and..."

"Yes, and..." Is Always the Best Bet

I often speak of the difference between "yes, but..." versus "yes, and..." in my seminars - which I consider a huge promoter of effective communication. What makes this minor difference in semantics so important? One stops a thought in its tracks ("yes, but...I don't like that idea and I'm introducing something new"). The other connects an additional idea to be considered jointly ("yes, and...to add to the point/idea you made I will add this as well").

Doing this small, yet significant shift in language promotes an atmosphere of acceptance and possibilities, not one of rejection and defeat. As a result, the workplace culture thrives - even under great stress and in the face of challenges. It becomes one of inspiration, not deflation.

Hours will get longer, numbers will get murkier and clients as well as co-workers will get tenser; however, if you remember to listen with the intent to understand, recognize the importance of staying positive and continue the ideas of those around you, you will be doing your part in improving communication and therefore improving the overall experience of everyone involved.

Just remember how you communicate this busy season will make all the difference.