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**Effective communication**

By Carole Spiers (Pressure Gauge)

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What do you say when you don't know what to say?

 THIRTY YEARS ago, Dubai was a small fishing port where people came to dive for pearls or trade gold. Now it is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and, when the Burj Dubai is completed in 2008, it will also be the proud location of the tallest office complex anywhere on the planet!

The steel skyscraper will be the latest example of the incredible range of buildings that stand as testimony to Dubai's growing reputation for creating structures that combine innovative architectural practice with styles that are truly unique.

But what is equally important for the future of Dubai business is that, once completed, the tenants that occupy the various office suites of the new Burj Dubai will take as much pride in the health and welfare of their employees as they do in their choice of local accommodation.

**The benefits**

In last week's column I spoke about the development of a healthy workplace culture as the key to sustainable success, and touched on the pivotal role of managers in creating an environment where team spirit is strong, employees support one another, and everyone works for the common good.

As I explained, one of the keys to achieving this is for managers to possess good communication skills - something which is very often not always the case.

Effective communication reduces the incidence of misunderstanding and consequent errors, and enables employees to be more readily aligned to the vision and leadership of the organisation, and therefore to work more efficiently. This in turn reduces the opportunity for disharmony, discontent or dissatisfaction and supports a healthy working culture.

**Building a 'listening culture'**

For organisations to be successful, a two-way communication channel is essential in all departments. It brings a more cohesive workforce, greater performance, higher productivity and an increased staff 'buy-in', because when people feel valued and recognised, they work harder and more enthusiastically to support the business in which they work.

The role of the manager in communicating effectively is key to developing a listening culture, but this is not always easy. People are not necessarily born to be good listeners, and it may take training and confidence-building in order to become one. It is a fact that managers are often promoted because of their technical or academic ability rather than for people management skills and we should put more effort into rectifying this situation.

The ability to listen actively improves self-confidence and encourages a better assessment of any proposed action, prior to it being taken.

Unfortunately, it is often the very people who require the most help who are unaware that they lack effective communication skills. They manage their departments by means of commands and instructions to their staff without any consultation regarding decisions to be taken that may affect work schedules, workloads or anything else. They feel in control as they do not need to discuss their decisions as they have never been encouraged by the organisational culture to do so.

There are many different aspects to this critical management skill, and just some of the components one may need to consider will include: understanding personal management style; using listening skills to help defuse stressful situations; improving listening skills to enhance personal and team performance; identifying ways these skills can be used as a valuable problem-solving resource; enhancing team building by improving atmosphere and culture; listening effectively to get the most out of teams; developing the confidence to listen; and applying the skills to professional situations such as return to work interviews, appraisals and performance reviews, and capability issues.

There are also specific aspects of conversational abilities that one may wish to improve. These include: anticipating reactions; choosing and making the right approach; using probing questions to promote conversation; specific techniques such as simple 'openers'; active listening and the use of open questions; key words and phrases; body language (verbal and non-verbal); what to / not to say; using silence; defusing conflict situations; and how to bring conversations to an end.

Active listening should be seen as an essential managerial tool and part of effective people management. It should be within the skills portfolio of all managers, and used in the maintenance of a stress-free work environment and the avoidance of disruption or discontent within the workforce.

**4-point Summary**

1. For organisations to be successful, a 'listening culture' is vital. It brings greater performance, higher productivity and increased 'buy-in' from staff.
2. Managers have a vital role in the effective communication that is key to developing a listening culture, but - as



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2. Managers have a vital role in the effective communication that is key to developing a listening culture, but as people aren't necessarily born good listeners - this may not be easy.

3. Unfortunately, it is often the very people who require the most help who derive the least benefit from it. [UAE News](#) - [Properties](#) - [Appointments](#) - [Used Cars](#) - [Classifieds](#) - [Gold / Forex](#) - [Prayer Timings](#) - [NRI Problems](#) - [RSS Feed](#) - [Weather](#)  
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4. Active listening should be seen as an essential managerial tool and part of effective people management

*Carole Spiers, the UK's leading Guru on corporate stress-management and organizational change, is also a regular BBC broadcaster and international author on these major business issues. Your questions and input on this or any related topic, will be welcomed. Each Friday, we will discuss a selection of your letters or case-studies. Please write to: [ktwkd@emirates.net.ae](mailto:ktwkd@emirates.net.ae) marked Carole Spiers in the subject column.*

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