

The International Communicator

communicating with competence

Spring 2006

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Have you ever been on a busy street, stopped and closed your eyes and just listened? Without the sense of sight a whole new world opens up to you. You hear things you have never been aware of before.

Likewise, we should learn to listen to other unconscious signals, whether as the leader of a multicultural team (s. right) or as a negotiator trying to close a sale (p. 4).

Picking up on the right signals will also alert you to health issues sapping your energy (p. 2) and to members of your virtual team who are feeling overlooked and neglected (p. 2).

Listening to what everyday life (p. 3) is trying to tell you will turn challenges into positive learning experiences. And you can defuse conflict situations by listening to what the other person has to say (p. 3).

N Vision Learning Solutions specializes in helping you to learn how to listen to and pick up on such subtle signals. Come listen and learn with us.

Joe Butler, Editor

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Leadership

Leading Across Cultures

Different cultures prefer different leadership styles. Leaders of multicultural teams must be aware of the expectations of their team.

What is the role of a leader? Harvard professor Edgar Schein has suggested that one of the most important functions of a leader is to shape corporate culture. As national culture plays a significant role in forming our core values of what is "right and wrong" or "good and bad," it partially determines the leadership style that will be most successful at meeting the expectations of employees from that culture.

Geerd Hofstede has identified two key elements of national culture that strongly affect corporate culture: power distance—the distance of members of an organization to the center of power—and uncertainty avoidance.

We can identify four typical "types" of organizations and four broad leadership "styles" to create a matrix. Plotting the position of a national culture in the matrix shows the leadership "styles" that

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The Bottom Line

Maintain Your Brain

Our bio-computer, our brain, is responsible for creativity and social competence. We have to learn to treat it well.

What will be the most significant factor driving the economy of the future?

You might say the increasing use of computer technology for creating wealth and optimizing work flow. But computers have (at least) one great drawback: They are not human—they are neither creative nor socially competent. This has led futurologist Matthias Horx to conclude that the human brain will be the decisive factor when facing the challenges of the future.

So in what circumstances do your employees' very own bio-computers—their brains—develop their full capacity?

As we know from research in chronobiology and psychoneuro-immunology, our brain reacts to permanent stress by producing the hormone cortisol, which constrains brain capacity. This reduces

the effectiveness of employees under stress. The brain produces this hormone as a reaction to any kind of stress and is not able to distinguish between emotional and physical strain.

“Encourage your employees to increase their awareness of stress generators and then ask them for solutions to help to develop healthy practices .”

How often do you look at your own personal health balance sheet? After all, the corporate balance sheet is scrutinized regularly. Investing in the health of your employees pays off. With a ROI of \$2 to \$4 on every dollar, managing the well-being of your organization is an important precondition for high performance and success.

There is both an individual and a collective component here. In practice this means that you need to analyze what is robbing your organizational and communication structures of vitality and energy. You can do this by transforming your employees into experts. Encourage your employees to increase their awareness of stress generators and then ask them for solutions to help to develop healthy practices in your organization.

Computers and human brains do have one thing in common. To be able to perform well, they both need to be well-maintained—and that's the bottom line.

Markus Schnitzer

N Vision Learning

Virtual Victory

When leading virtual teams, where face-to-face contact is minimal, disengagement by individual team members can be hard to distinguish from natural introversion. Effective leaders “double-up.”

Imagine that in the virtual team that you lead there are team and individual goals. Bonuses are based partly on team and partly on individual performance. You hold a virtual meeting that goes well and the outcome is the team meets its goal.

Unfortunately, one team member did not achieve their individual goal. Looking back, you realize that they did try talk about their goal; you either ignored it or did not hear it. Frustrated, in the end, they gave up trying.

This behavior is harder to identify in virtual teams. Is this team member naturally introverted or disengaged or uninterested? On the surface there may be little difference between the two.

For leaders of virtual teams, this can be a big challenge. Leaders need a keen awareness of what is happening in their team when vital visual clues do not exist. What steps can you—as the leader—take to increase this awareness?

- Be prepared. Create an agreed system of communications, including escalation pathways and ways to handle conflict.
- Be attentive to potential intercultural clashes within the team.
- Take the time to listen. Research shows that effective leaders often “double-up”—they send emails and talk—to overcome the inherent difficulties of not being face-to-face.

Steven Hunt

Food for Thought

“Companies should earn consumer trust, and consumers should bestow their trust wisely. Good companies earn trust for good reason.”

—Susan Pointer,
Director of European Public
Policy, Amazon.com

“In some organisations, diversity is considered a weakness or a reason not to perform—but we see it here as wealth, as a reason to perform.”

—Carlos Ghosn,
President and CEO, Renault

The Learning Corner

Word Watch

Life as a Learning Activity

We can benefit more from the challenges of daily life by learning how to reflect on them and integrate the lessons learned into our lives.

Powerful experiences in life provide some of our most deeply learned and longest retained lessons. Some things we simply do not forget. While our rational mind learns indirectly, thinks deliberately, pays attention to process and forgets rapidly; our experiential mind learns directly, pays attention to outcome and forgets slowly. Events that are accompanied by emotions result in long-lasting learning.

Learning strategies aimed not only at our analytical and rational, but also at our experiential minds foster the development of practical and creative intelligence, thereby enhancing our ability to succeed.

During learning strategy activities, guidance is often provided through the use of deliberate debriefing sessions that examine a series of key questions including:

What happened? What did you think and feel? How does this relate to your experiences at work?

The learning impact and positive benefits are clear to anyone having had the good fortune to experience a well-designed and well-debriefed learning activity.

But what about the wealth of learning opportunities in our daily lives? What's preventing us from using these as a personal forum for self-awareness? We are confronted by problems and challenges from a wide variety of situations—both professionally and privately. Add-

“Events that are accompanied by emotions result in long-lasting learning.”

ing the often ignored but vital step of reflection about these events is the difference between harvesting knowledge for the future and simply completing tasks. Analyzing their impact on our shifting levels of empathy, motivation, persistence and impulse control, among others, can take us to new dimensions of effectiveness, success and fulfillment.

Whether the events that most affect us are centered around managing conflict, reshaping corporate cultures, pushing the sales envelope, negotiating, process redesign, leading and motivating or any number of other areas, inclusion of a step for deep reflection on the lessons gleaned by the experiential part of our mind will further strengthen our ability to take ourselves and our organizations to where we aspire to be.

Conflict

Conflict: from Latin *conflictus*, past participle of *confligere* “to strike together” from *com-* “together” + *fligere* “to strike.” In its root form, the word *conflict* can in fact be seen as positive and creative in its meaning. Other phrases with the word “strike” that imply positive action or effects include: *strike a blow*, *strike home*, *strike while the iron is hot* and *strike a deal*.

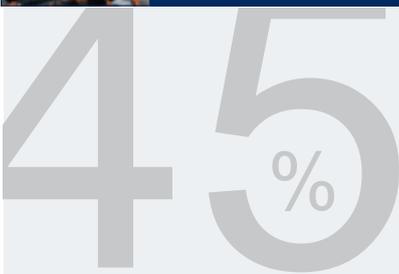
“We often hope that conflict goes away on its own. The opposite is usually true.”

The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* defines *conflict* as an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles. In today's society everyone usually wants to get along, have things run smoothly and have everything “nice”—therefore conflict is seen as something negative.

In a conflict you don't know what's going to happen. People might cry, get angry, stomp out, accuse you of something, get defensive or blame others. Most of all, you will have a whole lot of uncomfortable feelings moving around inside of you—and no one likes that.

We often hope that conflict goes away on its own. The opposite is usually true. When we don't deal with conflict, it festers, creates bad feelings and escalates. When dealt with constructively, conflict is a catalyst for growth, creativity and expansion. Conflict can be a creative coming or “striking” together that finds a solution that is greater than our individual opinions and principles.

Numbers



In a survey of over 500 working people, 45% said that they were required to do more and more in less and less time.

“Time pressure” was the highest scoring answer to the question:

“What aspect of your job gets on your nerves most?”

—EMNID opinion research institute, 2004

[Kieran McVey](#)

[Ieva Gaidulis](#)



Bodies That Sell

Action speaks louder than words. What is your body language telling your negotiating partner?

Body language communicates more about you than any words you say. A prospective client will judge you by what they see and feel within the first 10 seconds of meeting you. Psychologists say that 70% of the first impression you make comes from your body language. The smallest non-verbal cue such as eye contact or body posture reveals vast amounts of information concerning your confidence, credibility, attitude, empathy. This means that these silent signals could make or break your sale.

“70% of the first impression you make comes from your body language”

One major problem sales managers that I have coached make is that they send off mixed signals. For example, in a negotiation situation they might say, “This is our final offer.” But at the same time, they blink, look away from their customer, and nervously play with their pencil. To really gain trust, what you say and what you do have to match. I once saw a project leader present six months of hard work to his board. Even though the project results were great, he almost failed to gain the board’s commitment because of his nervous body language.

One way to test whether you give mixed signals is to record one of your telephone conversations or meetings on video. You will be surprised at what you see and hear.

BODY TALK

Learn

to “listen” with your eyes. Pay attention to your customer’s body language, especially facial gestures. Practice by watching television (or DVDs) with the sound turned off. Watch for changes in breathing, skin color, hand gestures, eye contact, leg movements.

Realize

that the culture a person is from will directly affect their body movements, expressions and posture—and their interpretation of these. For example, the “thumbs up sign” is interpreted very differently in the US, Australia, Nigeria and Greece.

Look

at the context to interpret body language. Just because a person has their arms crossed may not mean that they are defensive. It could simply mean that the room is cold.

Notice

the subtle signals your customer sends. If your customer is nervous or suspicious, it will be very difficult for them to hide it. Take advantage of these signals to direct the conversation and to find out what your customer’s real issues and concerns are.

Keep

your hands open and facing up. Outward and upward movements convey truthfulness and openness.

What challenging situation would you like us to deal with in a future issue of the *International Communicator*? Get our perspective. Send us an email at: communicator@nvision-learning.com. We will of course ensure that your challenging situation remains anonymous.

Use these tools to help you become aware of the body language between you and your customer. With this awareness, you can move customers from suspicion to openness. It will help you establish deeper relationships with those around you. Remember, these silent signals could make or break your sale.

Darrel Combs

Leading, continued from page 1

are preferred by people from those cultures.

Leading people is difficult enough when everyone has the same preferred leadership style. But what can you do when leading people with very differing expectations?

Effective global leaders “adapt” their leadership style to fit the cultural context when possible. Naturally, team members will also adapt over time, so the leader, as is so often the case, leads the way by being the first to adapt. When leading a multicultural team, an effective leader will bring differing expectations of leadership to the surface and create the transparency that makes it possible to find the “best fit” style for that team.

For more on leadership style, go to the N Vision website at www.nvision-learning.com/articles.

[Michael Couch](#) and [Mike Cook](#)