

NIMBLE: quick, alert, clever, agile, resourceful

Consider the overarching strategy of best-in-class organizations: an unrelenting focus on customers' priorities. This includes adapting positively at a moment's notice. Supporting this focus calls for deliberately preparing for swift action to weather uncertainty, but also for spurring innovation and taking advantage of unanticipated opportunity.

Nimble organizations execute immediate business priorities, navigate current economic conditions, and prepare for future long term health. Cost containment may be essential, but leaders can cultivate existing resources to aid in that endeavor, while at the same time avoid the mistake of honing in on the tip of the iceberg. What can organizations *do now* that will change the game in a substantive way and set the stage for prosperity? What *proactive* measures immediately address short term issues, but also maintain crucial alignment with long term organizational strategy?

RESOURCEFUL: acting effectively or imaginatively, especially in difficult situations

At a time when many aspects of the business environment seem out of control, there are two resources that can be leveraged to increase productivity and flexibility: people and time. Almost all facets in any enterprise involve the intersection of people and time, and these resources are often overlooked and underutilized.

Time is the ultimate non-renewable resource, but people are capable of taking control of this resource to accelerate processes in every business function.

When creativity and innovation could position your organization to come out on top after a downturn, examine the capabilities and conditions that will enable you to support core resources and drive that success. Nimble organizations are characterized by sustained attention to speed and resilience. Collaboration and streamlined processes are

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necessary to achieve the agility that best serves customers. Rapid market and technology changes demand it. In essence, nimble organizations *deliberately* adopt the following behaviors:

Nurture innovation

Increase collaboration across the organization

Maximize employee engagement

Broaden employees' skills

Lead with transparency

Exercise effective communication habits

One way to leverage people and time, thereby increasing nimble capabilities, is to take the opportunity to do a communication effectiveness reset. Every individual is unique, but there are some communication style preferences that are commonly found. If we want to achieve communication goals more quickly and easily, we can improve skills to accommodate basic communication styles. A communication reset involves:

- Enhancing understanding of basic communication styles
- Learning why valuing different styles is advantageous
- Learning how to purposefully and positively engage colleagues

An effective communication reset provides people with training and tools to accomplish current and future tasks with significantly improved ease and speed. This need not be over-complicated or time consuming, and is as obviously useful as learning how to use a map or GPS device. When we want to get to a particular destination on time, we employ tools to indicate the quickest route and prevent us from taking wrong turns. So, too, can we improve our ability to “tune in” to others so that we achieve our goals expeditiously. Performing a communication reset can help invigorate employees to get out of defensive “hunker down mode” and eliminate time wasting activities. Energized employees become more focused on contributing to the firm’s long term success.

How do enhanced communication skills benefit a nimble organization?

Nurture Innovation

Innovative products enhance opportunities to engage customers. Innovation doesn't just mean new product development; it also means understanding and fulfilling customers' personal and self-satisfaction goals. By enhancing communication skills, employees can improve their ability to understand and focus on customers' needs. Employees learn to ask the right questions and listen for vital cues.

Shortening the path to new product/service release is central to a core strategy of unrelenting focus on customers' priorities. When colleagues communicate with each other in a way that values different styles, it encourages diversity of thought. Diversity sparks creativity. When people know that they are valued for their unique perspective, trust is built, and trust is the foundation of high performance teams. High functioning teams are a necessity, not a “nice-to-aspirer-to,” for organizations that intend not only to survive, but also to excel and prosper. When people feel comfortable both challenging and contributing, they bring the contagious, positive energy necessary for excellence in innovation.

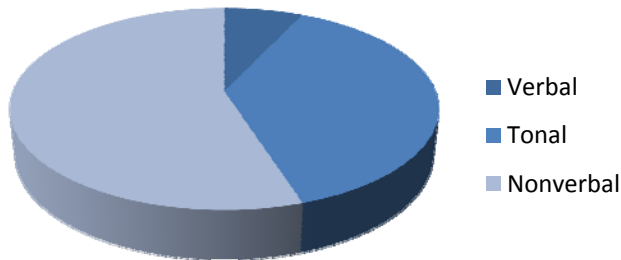
Not only is performance important for innovation, but the way the performance is achieved is relevant. We are more connected and open to customers than ever, so the way we treat others is critically important. Positive communication habits show through the organization's public interfaces.

Increase Collaboration across the Organization

A communication reset program helps leaders take deliberate action to emphasize that unproductive conflict, blaming, excuses, and lack of accountability are a thing of the past. Most of the communication that really matters - that builds relationships - is conducted person-to-person. Relationships may be maintained electronically, but trust is built person-to-person. Direct person-to-person communication is comprised of verbal, tonal, and nonverbal cues, and the more intense the

situation, the more people take meaning from tonal and nonverbal cues. When colleagues purposely focus on making each other comfortable, it is far more likely that they will understand the true intent of the conversation, not just the words.

Person-to-Person Communication Model



Encouraging internal challenges leads to improved ability to anticipate external challenges, and sets the tone for the debate of ideas. When there is trust and appreciation of diversity, there is an increase in collaboration along with a decrease in time-wasting, unproductive conflict. With trust, team members have confidence that their colleagues have positive intentions, and that it is safe to share problems and ask for assistance. When individual differences are supported and valued, constructive feedback/pushback occurs. Once team members have aired their opinions, they can move to action, commitment, accountability, and follow through. This is the fuel for positive change.

For collaboration to occur, people have to know who the influencers and connectors are, and where to go for knowledge and expertise. During challenging economic conditions it is often more difficult to make the connections because vital resources in the organizational chart may have moved. Using communication skill training to speed up the getting-to-know-you process helps colleagues find the people who know how things really work, and collect the right people to get things done.

Maximize Employee Engagement

An organization's short term survival may rest on its ability to harness productivity gains along with cost containment. By proving that honest communication is safe and valued, companies demonstrate that they are providing useful help - not just asking employees to do more with fewer resources. Valuing resourcefulness encourages employees to take ownership of processes and contribute to speedy decision making. Only when employees feel secure will they come forward with creative cost reduction and quality improvement ideas.

Understanding and appealing to individual motivation increases engagement. When a colleague proposes a useful suggestion, responding with "great idea" is not motivating. Recognition counts, and when leaders express recognition specifically to match an individual's communication style preferences, they signal that ideas are actually being heard, understood, and appreciated.

Retaining top talent is a high priority at all times, but essential during challenging economic times. A high performing employee is one of the most valuable assets of an organization. These are the self-starters who consistently exceed expectations, and create new opportunities, products, and services. When resources are scarce, managers depend even more on high performers to carry out critical work. This results in increased stress for the best employees and can result in eventual burn out. The people most needed to move the organization to higher quality, customer focus, and revenue are the ones most likely to leave at the first good opportunity.

High performers thrive on development opportunities, positive momentum and morale, and well-articulated vision. To keep talent from leaving, organizations need to effectively communicate what is going to change to improve the company's outlook. Understanding individual high performers' communication styles helps leaders convey the organization's vision in a way that will best motivate key talent.

Broaden Employees' Skills

Organizations that are proactive about education and skill development treat employees as valuable assets. Training indicates that the organization is looking to the future and plans to leverage individual talents. It also shows that the organization is filling the pipeline so that people can be promoted. Succession planning is a sign that forward momentum is expected.

Not only is training not a luxury, it is an alternative incentive. Skill development can be a motivating reward when it is not possible to award bonuses or pay increases. It gives employees practical acknowledgement that the organization recognizes their contributions.

When it is necessary to do more with less, providing new training and tools counteracts resentment and reassures employees that leaders “get it.” When employees understand that effective communication skills help them accomplish goals more quickly and easily, they feel more in control, even if they currently have reduced resources at their disposal.

Lead with Transparency

Transparency about company goals and direction is necessary to maintain morale and ensure forward movement. A leader's most important function is to communicate constantly and effectively with all stakeholders. Essential two-way communications include clarifying priorities, confirming organizational commitment, addressing rumors, allowing people to vent frustration and get accurate information, and most importantly, build trust. It is critical that people talk directly with those who can fill in the information gaps. An email or speech by the CEO is not going to establish trust because people rely most on the information they gather face-to-face. If leaders do not provide opportunities for direct conversation, employees will gather in the hallways - or virtual hallways - and fill in the gaps, sometimes with negative consequences.

Leaders need to be visible, approachable, and believable. They need to be candid about the challenges and opportunities ahead, and authentically share a vision of the future that overcomes apathy and counters protectionist attitudes. Authentic communication focuses on understanding different views and interpretations of apparent facts. When people engage in authentic dialogue, they distinguish between purpose and communication style, resulting in greater insight and opportunities for improvement.

Bolstering communication skills helps leaders establish a fresh start, helps them increase influence one relationship at a time, and speeds coalition building.

Exercise Effective Communication Habits

What capability do nurturing innovation, increasing collaboration, maximizing employee engagement, broadening skills, and leading with transparency have in common? Effective communication skills. Behavior is a choice, but the most basic behavior of all, communication, is often left to chance. Either people get along with each other and “click,” or they don't. They get the message across, or they don't. They understand each other, or they don't.

Exercising effective communication habits means viewing this vital behavior as an opportunity for improved productivity, even if only out of enlightened self-interest. It means employing useful approaches that include honoring individuals' differences, and, especially, maintaining focus on desired outcomes.

An Effective Communication Reset Program

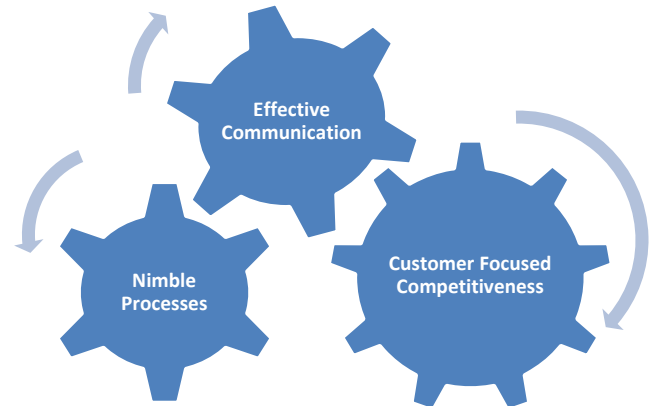
Companies must first survive the economic downturn, and in the midst of cost cutting and budget reductions, it may seem antithetical to consider employee training as a survival tool. In fact, the right training not only helps organizations take the necessary short term actions, but it can also set the stage for rapid response to improving conditions.

When choosing a platform for an effective communication reset, it is important to keep the end in mind: elevating the organization's capacity to be nimble. This means deploying a program that is easy to understand, easy to implement, transparent, supports openness, and, most importantly, is action oriented. Look for the following attributes:

- Outward focused to increase speed with effective communication
- Valid communication style survey construction
- Easy to administer communication style survey
- Easy to understand survey output: written explanation, color coded, graphic, etc.
- Easy to understand written explanation of communication style concepts
- Standardized training methods to support maximum learning
- Interactive review materials
- Interactive website with individualized guidance for working with team members
- Provides additional personalized learning, such as free surveys for family members
- Non-threatening, emphasis is on basic style preferences
- Sustainable, easy for new team members to get individualized guidance at any time

We are deliberate and purposeful about many endeavors in our lives because we know that improvement does not simply occur by itself. Anyone who wants to excel at a sport knows that deliberate attention to skill development is essential. Typically this means getting some coaching/training

and practicing. As with almost every endeavor that improves our lives, we can apply straightforward process improvement methods to attaining communication effectiveness goals. When purposefully positive communication habits become part of a nimble culture, honest feedback and accelerated business processes align to serve the ultimate strategy: unwavering commitment to customer priorities.



Synchronization – the difference between just competing, and winning.

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