

4.0 Planning for Better Business Communication

Objectives: If all goes well what do I hope to accomplish? (Multiple objectives that go beyond your primary goal...)

Outcomes: What observable actions do I want my audience (whether an audience of 1 or 100!) to take?

Operational Plan: What questions will I ask and what statements will I make in order to achieve objectives?

Outstanding Benefits: How will my audience benefit if they listen to me?

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As the quote to your right suggests, communication-related problems can be difficult to diagnose...

Consider that if a person is a poor listener, they don't really know what they are missing!

"The single biggest problem in communication is the *illusion* that it has taken place"

– George Bernard Shaw

Similarly, if we think we are communicating in a straightforward and understandable fashion we may neglect to confirm this with our audience – consequently we will "assume" that our message was accurately received and understood. But, as George Bernard Shaw has suggested, this assumption is often an *illusion*.

One way to improve the reliability of our communication is to anticipate and plan its delivery. By the way, this habit of planning most often results in enhanced productivity for all parties as well, because by spending just a few minutes planning in advance we are usually able to identify multiple objectives for each interaction – therefore we are suddenly able to do more in less time.

This can result in a significant advantage over the course of one's career!

What specific things do we hope to accomplish during conversations, telephone calls, presentations or meetings? How will we go about doing so?

How will we phrase our questions? What types of questions should we ask – open-ended or closed?

How will we confirm if our audience has, in fact, correctly understood our message? In addition, please note, that if we should discover that our audience has not accurately interpreted our communication, we should not blame them! It is, after all, our responsibility to communicate in a way others can understand. It is our responsibility to associate objectives with each interaction and to communicate in a way that enables us to achieve those objectives.

We might also ask ourselves, in advance, "Why should our audience listen to us? Why should they agree to take action or to accept our ideas?"

Finally, if the audience does agree with and accept what we've put forth, what consequential next steps do we wish them to take? What are the specific observable actions associated with our objectives?

Thus the simple 4.0 plan on page one...

Instructions: You can use this plan for any type of important business communication, whether it is with an audience of 1 or 100 or more.

OBJECTIVES: In bullet-point fashion, list the specific things YOU hope to accomplish during each interaction, whether it is a conversation, presentation or meeting. Be SPECIFIC and detailed by including things you'd like to learn about your audience (about their situation, objectives, knowledge, etc.) as well as things you'd like to tell them.

OUTCOMES: List the specific next steps or observable actions you'd like your audience to take as a result of the communication.

OPERATIONAL PLAN: Write some of the questions you might ask or statements you might make to achieve each of your listed objectives.

OUTSTANDING BENEFITS: How will you and your audience benefit from the interaction? Why should they listen to you? Why should they agree to the OUTCOMES? If these questions can't be answered in advance, include a bullet in your OBJECTIVES section to get the answers!