



Route to Profits

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Sometimes all you need is a little direction...

Communication has to be one of the most misunderstood and misused tools in business. We have all seen the exercise where a small group of people will try to pass a short simple message from one to the other by whispering the message from person to person. It is always comical to hear the last person's translation of the message. If that simple message can be garbled in a small group of people, can you imagine how confused your employees may be about your image and goals for your business?

So how do you effectively communicate with your employees and not waste time in meetings? Make no doubt about it, effective communication does not just happen. You must work on it and be consistent.

I would like to refer you to a book by Thomas A. Kayser called *Mining Group Gold*. Kayser is a former executive with Xerox Corporation, who is credited for helping the company win the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. He used a common sense method of effective meeting style that you can apply in your business as well. Here are a few pointers from the book you can use right away.

If you try these simple steps, your next meeting will be much more effective.

- 1) Planning for every meeting should include answers to the following questions:
 - What is the meetings purpose and desired outcome?
 - Is a group session necessary?
 - Who should attend?
 - Are there any problems that could occur during the meeting?
 - What is the agenda content and topic flow?
- 2) Every meeting should have an agenda with an estimated time allotted for each topic. For example, introduction – 15 minutes, discussion of new product line – 60 minutes, etc.

- 3) Every meeting should have a meeting **facilitator**, meeting **timekeeper**, and a meeting **scribe**.

The **facilitator's** job is to plan the meeting, prepare the agenda, and maintain the focus of the group on the tasks outlined in the agenda. As a rule of thumb, the facilitator should spend approximately as much time preparing for the meeting as the duration of the meeting. This may seem like a lot of preparation, but remember one person will demand the time of many in the meeting therefore, for the meeting to be successful, preparation is necessary.

It should be noted here the facilitator does not do all the talking. In fact his sole job is to keep the meeting running smoothly. He may or may not have input in the meeting agenda but if he does have input he stops being the facilitator for that portion of the meeting.

The **timekeeper's** job is to make sure the group is aware of the time being taken to accomplish each task and to provide regular updates to keep members aware of

where the meeting stands with regard to time. It should be noted that the timekeeper is not the time police. If the group is taking longer than planned on an important topic, so be it. The time keeper's job is simply to remind the group what time it is and if they are exceeding the allotted time for a topic. The group will then determine whether or not to come to a conclusion on the topic, table the topic or continue the discussion.

The **scribe** is responsible for keeping notes concerning decisions reached and action item assignments. For example, who has agreed to do what by when?

Obviously, in *Mining Group Gold*, Kayser goes into much more detail and expands on these concepts. However, if you will try these simple techniques for meetings in your business; I think you will find your meetings more effective and you will get the results you are looking for.

“How do you effectively communicate with your employees and not waste time in meetings?”