

What Did You Say? By Terry Arndt

In a recent Life After Graduation, LLC survey, employers and college career centers ranked verbal communication as one of the top skills college graduates lack – and recent college graduates agree. When asked what skills do you believe would have been beneficial to learn prior to entering the workplace, nine out of ten recent college graduates cited verbal communication in their top two responses. Understanding pay and benefits was #1.

Knowing how to interact with colleagues, supervisors, and clients effectively is vital in ALL professional fields – not just business-related positions like sales and marketing. In today’s workforce, communication skills are not optional – they are essential for every professional and can only be mastered with practice and a concerted effort.

Your success in the workplace is directly linked to your ability to interact with those around you. So what can you do to become an effective communicator?

Rate of speaking.

Do you speak rapid-fire or back-porch? If you speak too fast, you risk losing people and/or appearing insecure. If you speak too slowly, you risk boring people and/or appearing, well, slow.

Volume.

You have good ideas and the skills to put them into action, but if you mumble you are creating an obstacle to your own success. Speak clearly, enunciate, and project confidence.

Non-verbal elements.

Eye contact, posture, fidgeting...all of these non-verbal cues can really reinforce—or sabotage—what you verbalize. Be aware of what your body is saying at all times.

Practice.

Get out and start speaking – In front of class, groups, co-workers, etc. Take every chance you have to speak and use it to better yourself. Becoming a member of your local Toastmasters club is also a great way to develop your skills. You can learn more at www.Toastmasters.org.

There’s really no proof that good grammar and vocabulary are indicators of high intelligence or advanced degrees. However, if you are well spoken and articulate, people will assume you are intelligent, educated, and capable. If you use poor grammar and exercise a limited vocabulary, people will believe just the opposite.

Having spoken 10,000 or more words a day since childhood, you undoubtedly developed a few bad communication habits. And, like any bad habit—whether it’s using slang or lots of “likes” and “uhs”—it can be hard to break. However, the benefits to becoming an effective communicator are well worth the effort.

According to John Frederickson, VP of Operations for a physicians group in Florida, Communication skills are definitely *the* key to success. “If I can get my message across better than the next person, and I sound great doing it, I’ve just made a valuable impression – and our clients agree.” John may be on to something. For the last four years, John’s company has been ranked #1 in customer satisfaction. John attributes this to his staff’s communication skills. What does this mean for his employees? Higher wages.

According to John, he provides his new employees a starting wage that is at least 15% higher than those offered by his competitors. “We want the best – and to me, the best is a candidate that possesses strong communication skills. It’s that important.”

Terry Arndt is President of Life After Graduation, LLC. To learn additional information about effective communication skills and other valuable career transition issues, read *Backpack To Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career*. Available at www.LifeAfterGraduation.com.



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