

Thanks for taking the time to read this excerpt from the *Effective Communication Skills Handbook*. The **5 Keys to Effective Communication** section is one of nine sections that make up the entire handbook. This excerpt includes three of the five keys explained in the full section. If you like what you read here, you'll really enjoy the entire handbook.

## 5 Keys to Effective Communication

With rare exceptions most communication is verbal and face-to-face. Email, instant messaging and texting are communication methods that are becoming more and more prominent. However, speaking to individuals and groups is still the most common form of communication, so we'll start there.

In my experience I've identified five keys to communicating effectively. If you do nothing else to grow your business or your career, learn these keys and use them consistently and diligently.

### **Key #1: Don't automatically accept what people say as being correct.**

What others tell you during conversations may very well be correct, but it never hurts to make sure. Have you ever accepted something told to you as gospel only to find out later that it's just not right?

If you pass information along at face value and it turns out to be wrong, it's possible to end up embarrassed or in trouble, especially in business situations.

A few easy questions asked pleasantly can help clarify what you've been told. Here are a few examples.

- *"That's interesting. Where did you hear that?"*
- *"Did the person who told you that happen to give you the source for this information?"*
- *"Do you have any documentation to support that?"*

Bottom line; make sure the information you receive is factual before accepting it as correct and passing it along to others.

**Key #2: Don't assume that the people you talk with understand what you say the way you intend it to be understood.**

There are some interesting statistics that demonstrate the problems this assumption can cause.

An example of the problems caused by assuming that people you give information to understand that information the way you intend it is made clear by the result of a Dunn and Bradstreet study.

The study determined that one of the top three reasons that companies fail is improper delegation. Delegation is simply assigning tasks to an individual or a group with the expectation that a specific outcome will be the result.

Problems arise when work isn't delegated so the expectations, timeframes and budgets are fully understood and agreed to. Deadlines can be missed. Finished products can be wrong. Workers can be frustrated. Customers can be unhappy. None of these things are positive and they can all be costly.

Another example relates to the conclusion of other research, which found that the American worker only works to 50% or 60% of his or her capacity. Ineffective communication is one of the primary reasons for this statistic.

For example, if work is delegated ineffectively the result will often be wrong.

When results are wrong work has to be redone. That extends timeframes. Plus, the person having to redo the work is likely to be less effective because she was told that something she worked hard to do correctly turned out to be wrong. And, the person who did the delegating is likely to be less effective because he is upset that the work wasn't completed as he expected.

It's a downward spiral that should be avoided at all costs.

When you're having an important conversation with others ask some non-intimidating questions throughout the process to make sure what you're saying is being understood the way you want it to be.

- *"Am I making this clear enough?"*
- *"Does that makes sense to you?"*
- *"What's your understanding of what I just said? I want to be sure I'm making this clear."*

If your conversation involves the delegation of work, clarifying questions are extremely important.

- *“Are you comfortable with the timeframe for this project?”*
- *“Do you have all the resources you need?”*
- *“Will my checking with you every two or three days be enough or should it be more frequently?”*
- *“Did I explain the process for coming to me for help clearly enough?”*

Unfortunately, too many people in my experience move through their work assuming that others have the same understanding of something as they do. This bad habit of assuming creates far too many situations that waste time and cost money.

Here’s a basic rule of effective communication.

***If you want something from others, it’s your responsibility to communicate in a way that is comfortable for them. It is your responsibility to make sure they understand what you say the way you intend it to be understood.***

**Key #3: Become fully aware of the components of communication and the effects they can have on others.** Communication consists of the following three components, tone of voice, gesture, and words.

The way each of these three components of communication contributes to the whole is: 55% tone of voice, 38% gesture, and only 7% words. Not being aware of this information can lead to problems.

For example, it’s said that the number one cause of frustration in the workplace, and probably at home as well, is tone of voice. It’s not so much what you say as how you say it.

Always be aware of your tone, especially in tense situations or when communicating with someone who may be overly sensitive to tone of voice.

In these situations take a breath or wait a beat before speaking to remind yourself about the importance of your tone of voice as it relates to the outcome you want.

When you’re talking on the phone the person or group on the other end of the call can’t see you. They can’t see your facial expressions or gestures. That means you lose 38% of your ability to communicate.

In these situations your word choice and tone become much more important.

It's often to your benefit to exaggerate the modulation of your speech when talking on the phone. It will probably sound a bit strange to you, but it will sound natural to those on the other end of the line.

One good way to accomplish this is to stand up during an important phone call. The people you're speaking with will feel the change in your energy.

When writing letters, reports, e-mail messages, press releases, etc. you lose 93% of your ability to communicate effectively. It's all words here. It's extremely important that you choose your words well and string them together carefully.

When writing, remember these general tips.

- Write the way you talk. Use short sentences. Don't use unnecessarily complicated words unless you're writing a technical report or something similar that requires specific words that apply to your topic.
- Use lots of white space. Make what your writing inviting to read. Use a font that's comfortable on the eyes. Most readers won't even get started if the format of a document consists of long, tedious paragraphs crammed closely together.
- Check your spelling and punctuation. Make sure you're producing a grammatically correct document. Remember, spell check features don't recognize a correctly spelled word being used incorrectly. You don't want to end up using the wrong word even though it's spelled right.
- Avoid using all capital letters unless your intent is to emphasize a point.
- Read what you've written out loud. If it doesn't sound comfortable and natural when reading it aloud, it won't be comfortable to read silently.
- When replying to an email that was sent to a group, don't use the "Reply to All" button unless your reply is important to the entire group.

## About the Author

My name is Brian Silverthorn. I've been working as a business consultant and a personal development coach for the past 25 years. Before getting into the consulting and coaching business I started and grew two successful businesses in the service, repair and construction industries.

I have a strong belief that all people deserve the opportunity to create a happy and fulfilling lifestyle for themselves. My passion is helping people achieve what they want in life by making the most of their businesses and their careers.

I also have a basic belief that we all have the capacity to have everything we want in life. We just have to develop the right attitudes, skills and habits and allow it to happen. In order to create that ideal life we have to:

- believe it can happen (because it can),
- figure out or discover work that allows us to express our natural talents and skills,
- and learn everything we can about becoming the best we can be at the work we do.

I've spent most of my time as a consultant and coach over the years helping business owners and individuals resolve issues that were keeping them from getting the results they wanted from their businesses and their careers.

The programs I write and teach are based on what I've learned by helping my clients achieve their individual versions of success. All the programs focus on the skills, techniques, habits and attitudes that help people create and enjoy the lives they want to live. Becoming very effective in all of the areas that have the greatest impact on your business or your career will speed and guarantee your success.

Visit my website, [www.feedthegoodwolf.com](http://www.feedthegoodwolf.com), to learn more. While you're at it sign up for my weekly *Success Tips* email.

If your organization is interested in some personal help on any of the topics discussed in the Success Guides I write, give me a call at 916.933.9480 or send an email to [bsilverthorn@feedthegoodwolf.com](mailto:bsilverthorn@feedthegoodwolf.com). I speak and facilitate workshops regularly and, if you have a need and an interest, I'd be happy to help.

What ever you decide to do in life,  
I wish you great success.



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