

Women in business: communication skills



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Communication skills are key to climbing the corporate ladder and raising status in the workplace. Oftentimes, lack of communication skills will cost an employee crucial opportunities to get what they want such as the wage they believe they deserve or an important idea they would like to get across.

Efficient communication also leads to good connections and networks, which are beneficial because it measures an employee's reach and influence. In two of the case studies covered in class, we highlighted the significance of effective communication and studied the losses associated with inadequate communication skills.

To begin, we considered a case about equal pay discrimination versus lack of negotiation skills. In the end, I concluded that Caroline lacked the proper negotiation skills that her peer had and she did not get less pay because of her gender. In a meeting with the president of her publishing company, Calvin Kuehn, she reviewed the extra assignments she was given but did not mention at any point that she believed she deserved a monetary compensation for the work. On the other hand, Jack came into his meeting with a collection of arguments ready for Mr. Kuehn, bringing up his personal commitment to the company in an effort to negotiate a higher wage. If Caroline wanted more pay, she should have demanded a bonus for the additional hours she was putting in instead of assuming that she automatically deserves more pay if Jack does. It is clear that Jack utilized his communication and negotiation skills to arrive at his goal fairly.

Additionally, Caroline could have entered the meeting with more confidence in herself and in her work like Jack did. In the case study, she was described “frantically” putting together a report on her latest projects. In contrast with

Jack, who walked into the president's office with a calm and collected statement, " I've been working on this steadily since we last met. I think you will be pleased with it" (99, Reeves), Caroline was more straight-to-the-point and less smooth. Mr. Kuehn was friendly and supported Caroline's timetables after reading her report, showing no signs of dissatisfaction. He did not treat Jack differently in their meeting, eliminating possibility of discrimination. Instead, Jack presented his timetables in a more engaging manner than Caroline, verbally walking through his plans and thoroughly explaining the new strategies he had developed. Following this display of strong communication skills, he took the moment to also discuss a large raise that his recent hard work deserved. Though both of these senior editors were doing the same work, only Jack has earned his raise by explaining his plans whereas Caroline simply handed a document to her boss, clearly an insufficient form of exchange in the business world.

People should be paid or given a raise based on business merit like communication and negotiation skills because that's a personal quality that is of high value in business, as it establishes connections and helps gain influence. Mr. Kuehn shows that he values this quality in his employees like Jack by essentially rewarding this behavior with a raise. This is a smart business decision because the president is investing in Jack's potential; Jack's confidence and the way he presents himself will ultimately get him farther in business, therefore he is a more valuable player in the game than Caroline is and deserves the large raise. Alternatively, Mr. Kuehn would be unwise if Caroline had a similar strength in negotiation as Jack and does not

receive a raise, which clearly demonstrates favoritism towards Jack or even discrimination against women.

Next, a case about an unorganized meeting among engineers in a temperature gauge production company highlights the differences in communication styles in between genders. The exchange between Chandra, Jeff, Margo, and Michael was undoubtedly inefficient. Jeff and Michael seem to be personal friends because they arrive at the meeting together discussing a weekend game of golf and later leave the meeting together to grab lunch at the deli. Margo takes on a leadership role in this case as the chair of the meeting. The men showed a disproportionate amount of respect to their fellow engineers, giving attention to Margo as she chaired the meeting and ignoring Chandra's opinion completely. Chandra's role is valuable to the company though her introvertedness creates a communication barrier that is difficult for her to overcome, thus overwhelming her chances to contribute effectively to business decisions. The case study mentioned her anxiety before the meeting began, aware that the "decisions are made too quickly and the loudest voices carry the day" (157, Reeves). Her competency is not in question- prior to the meeting, she studied the project timetables and prepared adequately by gathering her thoughts to be shared with the board. Jeff supported his own idea by interrupting Chandra in the middle of her opinion and her lacking communication skills were too weak to overcome his dominance in the meeting, so her attempted contribution became ineffectual.

A concept explored in this case study is the difference in communication styles between genders and if that has an effect in Chandra's dilemma.

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Biologically, men and women's communication styles do not differ, but culture has an enormous influence. Women are judged harshly, held to their stereotypes, while men are unfairly forgiven for small blunders that women typically aren't. Since boys and girls were brought up in separate ways, certain biases were created so in turn, people respond very differently according to gender. As children, boys are taught to be more aggressive than girls are, through gendered activities that include competitive outcomes like winners and losers. On the other hand, girls are encouraged to be more nurturing and responsible, playing "house" and taking care of dolls for fun. While men and women are not born with distinct communication skills, they are shaped by society to be complementary opposites and to be treated differently. Since the corporate business world is dominated by white males, it becomes more difficult for an introverted woman like Chandra to make connections like the interpersonal bond that Jeff and Michael share, and become more influential in her field, especially while her peers are unwilling to simply listen to her in their meeting.

As shown by case studies on pay negotiation and communication within a meeting, there is a delicate connection between gender and communication. People skills are essential for excelling in the business world and rising in the corporate hierarchy. As society encourages women to be less confrontational and assertive, females typically have to put more effort into building strategic communication skills to seize the few opportunities they have to achieve their ambitions. A calculated approach to developing these personal qualities will force prevailing male peers in a workplace to recognize the

competency of a confident female employee and in turn, she will gain the influence, credit, or compensation she deserves.