

Communication in the organizational setting

Organizations are such an omnipresent facet of people's lives today that many corporations are establishing on-site counselors, wellness programs, programs for total body fitness, diet centers, food distribution centers, relaxation centers, reading rooms, movie viewing rooms and even bars. Organizations have become to the current adult in the United States what churches in smaller communities have been for years: a gathering place to learn about the world and to socialize with others.

In this culture, people spend most of their adult lives working within and for some type of organization (profit, non profit, not-for-profit). Given this fact, it is important that people learn the basics about effective and successful communication in the organizational environment.¹

Communication is the tool by which people succeed or fail in organizations. It takes effective communication to make job experiences work. This chapter reviews concepts and information that employees need to know about communication to survive and thrive in the organizational environment. It provides information that should help people survive organizations on a daily basis and not "look like idiots."

As Scott Adams, creator of *Dilbert* suggests, in the work force, "Everyone is an idiot, not just the people with low SAT scores. The only difference among us is that we're idiots about different things at different times. No matter how smart you are, you spend much of your day being an idiot." The communication ideas presented in this unit should help "idiot proof" employees in organizations.²

Idea 1: "It's not what you know but who you know." Sad, but true in too many cases. Whether a person works in a school, prison, business, health care, education, military, public service or an insurance system, unless the person is extremely multi-talented and incredibly brilliant the person needs to know the informal networking in the organization. Formal networking is usually rather straightforward. It follows the "chain of command" and is based on organizational charts.

Informal networking can be complex. The informal network is often described as the grapevine that grows throughout the organization. It is also referred to as the unseen communication connections that usually have little or nothing to do with the formal network. Every employee needs to know the formal network, but equally important is the informal network (who is really talking with whom).

Employees who fail to become socialized and do not learn the informal networking system in their organization are likely to make many communication mistakes. Employees need to know who is talking to whom, who is spending time with whom, who eats lunch together, who plays golf together, who lives where, and who was last promoted and why. Through socialization, employees can learn the unspoken and unwritten norms of the organization.³ Employees learn what to wear, how to talk, what to say and what not to say. Again, brilliant employees may not need to be aware of the socialization process and informal networking, however, less-than-brilliant employees will find this information essential. Often decisions are made on the basis of whom a person knows, not what the person knows.