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Lessons from Hanuman - The 7 Cs of Communication

Hanuman is one of the most revered Gods in Hindu mythology for the various virtues he stands for – loyalty, courage, strength, fairness and communication. In this article, we explore how we can learn about the 7 C's of effective communication from Hanuman. This facet of his character comes to the fore when he meets Ram and Lakshman for the first time in the epic Ramayana.

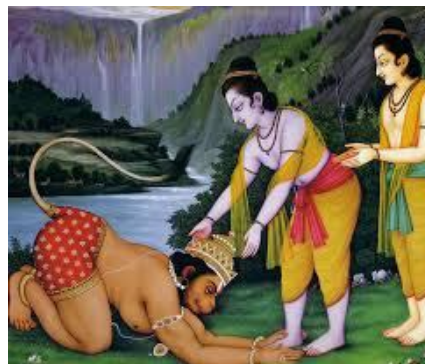
The time is when Ravan has abducted Sita, and Ram and Lakshman are looking for her everywhere. They enter a forest near a lake called Pampa. They have royal physique and bearing, but are dressed like hermits. They are armed but do not seem threatening. The exiled monkey king, Sugreev is intrigued and also worried that his brother Vali may have sent some mercenaries to kill him. So, he asks his trusted Deputy, Hanuman to find out about these two strangers in their vicinity. Hanuman approaches Ram and Lakshman in the guise of an ascetic Brahmin and begins to speak. From here, Hanuman's words and actions are a lesson in effective communication.

COMPLETENESS - Hanuman had extensive knowledge of the Vedas – scriptures – and that essentially made his message complete, as he knew exactly what to say. Hanuman's speech was complete, in that he elaborated on the seeming anomalies in their

appearance and asked the purpose behind their presence in the Sundarban forest.

CORRECTNESS- Hanuman was learned in grammar and there was not a single mistake in his speech, either of grammar or of fact.

CONCISENESS -Hanuman's speech was precise and he did not speak anything in excess of the need. His words were quick and to the point. His message was not verbose.



CONSIDERATION - Hanuman was considerate in his speech. Recognising the strangers (Ram-Lakshman) in the forest for what they might be, Hanuman crafts his message with their status in mind. Realising that the strangers seem to be of royal blood and learned, he quotes from the Vedas and scriptures to substantiate his point. He is respectful but not subservient.

CONCRETENESS - Hanuman's message did not get lost in generalities. He was specific and his use of words was pleasing. He did quote from the scriptures but only to validate his point, not to show off his knowledge.

CLARITY - Hanuman's message was clear and unambiguous. Despite their regal bearing, they were dressed like hermits, so what were they doing in the forest? He used the right level of language and there was no chance of misinterpreting his words.

COURTEOUSNESS - Hanuman has an orderly refinement in the speech that is remarkable, and he speaks gracious words that are pleasing. His purpose is to find out the reason why Ram and Lakshman were in the forest. However, he does not demand to know the reason, he requests for the information.

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Conducting Effective Meetings

Amit is sitting in one of the weekly review meetings with his team mates and boss. He does not understand the point of wasting time in this meeting. There seems to be no specific agenda, no real outcome.. he waits desperately for his phone to ring so that he has a reason to walk out of the meeting and excuse himself for a few moments to check his mail and make important phone calls.

Does this setting seem familiar? If we were to do a study of the amount of managerial time wasted in meetings with no specific agenda, we would realise that freeing precious managerial time by conducting crisper and focused meetings would in itself bring in efficiencies which could significantly enhance productivity and profitability.

Here are a few practical pointers on how to conduct effective meetings -

1. Determine if the meeting is necessary

The fact that you've always had a Monday morning meeting does not mean it is essential. Maybe a fortnightly meeting is all that is required and other meetings can be set up if something urgent comes up.

2. Set your objectives

Prepare an agenda and set objectives for the meeting. Share this information with the other attendees well in advance and invite them to add agenda items in the days or weeks before the meeting. Provide an approximate time frame for each point on the agenda.

3. Allow only a minute for the minutes

If there are minutes from the last meeting, distribute them in advance. Too many meetings get derailed when the previous meeting's decisions are recapped for those who did not attend and the discussion is reopened.

4. Stay on track

Start on time, and do not repeat everything for latecomers unless it is absolutely essential. Use a flip chart or white board to write important points.

5. Create a standard meeting protocol

This could include general rules like "Don't Interrupt, Stay on the Topic," "Be Respectful and Polite" and "Be Brief."

6. Allow people to opt out

No one should feel imprisoned in a meeting. If you only need Mr X from admin team for one item on the agenda, offer him the option of arriving late and leaving early.

7. Watch the time

Appoint a timekeeper if you will be discussing contentious issues that historically have caused lengthy debates. If a couple of participants engage in a discussion that could be better resolved outside the confines of the meeting, suggest that they take it off-line, discuss it later and report the results by e-mail or at the next meeting.

8. Maintain control

If heated arguments break out, reinforce your role as the meeting leader. Remember that someone needs veto power to cut through debates and bring back order, and that responsibility falls squarely on your shoulders.

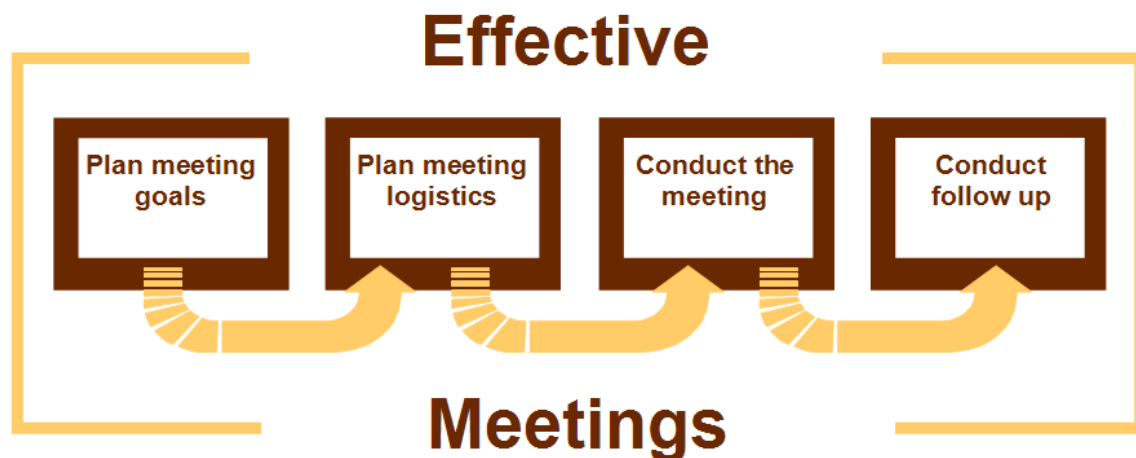
9. Engage the participants

If you want to encourage active participation, give participants an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions, within the available time constraints.

- Brainstorming will not likely be productive in a rush meeting, so only do this if is necessary.
- When there are a number of issues to discuss and the assembled group is large,
- consider having breakout sessions. You'll find the entire exercise goes faster and your meeting is much more productive.
- Having listed concerns, causes and possible solutions, each group can present their findings for further discussion and strategic planning.

10. Recap

At the close of any meeting, ensure that you briefly repeat the major decisions reached and the next steps planned. Confirm the date and time of the next meeting, if one is necessary. Follow up with a brief written recap and a copy of the action plan, notice of the next meeting and a request for additional agenda items.



Breaking Ground through Negative Feedback

“Feedback is the breakfast of champions” – Ken Blanchard

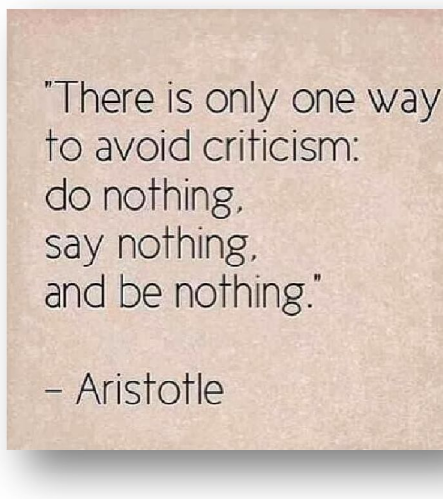
Feedback, as we all know is one of the most important aspects of our professional existence. We need feedback to learn, to grow, to improve and to excel at our work. Without feedback, we are walking blind, aimlessly through the dark. Why is it then that many managers and employees dread giving or receiving feedback esp when it is negative.

There are times when we do well and our efforts create desired results. Such actions and efforts are welcomed by positive feedback and appreciation which generate lots of positive energy and enthusiasm to work more to get even better results. However, there are times when we may be out of sync, our efforts not producing desired results, few circumstances not working in our favour or plainly that we could not perform upto the expectations. In these and many such other circumstances we are unable to create the desired result leading to criticism and negative feedback. These scenarios are usually stressful for both managers and employees. After all who wants to be the bearer of bad news! What actually creates stress is an inherent belief that ‘criticism is always bad’. It becomes damaging to our psyche because we think it is damaging.

What if we thought of negative feedback as **‘windows of opportunity’** to improve our performance, to see what we couldn’t see ourselves and turn things around. Why doesn’t negative feedback inspire us to think differently, do things differently and get outstanding results. Consider the following negative feedback which were given to people who went on to become living legends –

- Oprah Winfrey was fired from Baltimore’s WJZ TV for being ‘too emotionally’ involved with the stories she reported.
- Amitabh Bachchan was rejected as a newsreader as his ‘voice quality’ was very bad
- Steven Spielberg was denied by USC’s prestigious film school not once, but twice

- Lady Gaga got dropped by a major record label after only three months
- Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because ‘he lacked imagination and had no good ideas’.



The idea is not to become totally impervious to negative feedback. It holds too much important information to ignore. What we definitely need to do is to filter good data from junk and take steps for improvement. People who are able to handle criticism better tend to be more successful. All of us are humans and ‘to err is human’. We all go through phases of Ups and Downs. Even God of cricket (Sachin Tendulkar) can’t hit a century every time. The idea is to be consistent in our efforts and be conscious of how each effort can be made better next time. High performers are often high performers because they are good at accepting feedback and using it as a fuel for personal growth.

So buck up, stop letting criticism sting you and start using it to your advantage. Here are some tips:

1. **De personalize it** – If we view criticism as condemnation of our character, an indictment of who we are then its going to have a crippling effect on our psyche. Take it as a view on one particular event,

one valuable data point for improvement and we are suddenly liberated from devastating negative emotions.

2. **Filter** – Once we find value in negative feedback, we need to filter out useful nuggets of information, even if its delivered in a harsh manner. Mark Murphy, Founder of Leadership IQ, uses a model to break down the layers of a conversation into Facts, Interpretations, Reactions, Ends – F.I.R.E. Take what’s useful and move on.
3. **Self Belief** – It pays off to be thick skinned and have confidence in self. Psychological toughness helps people understand that it was a indeed a mistake, but it can be absolutely fixed.
4. **Reach Out** – We have abundant resources at our disposal only if we are ready to use them. If we work collaboratively, engage others, take their help and help others, we expand our universe of learning.
5. **Follow Up** – Many people want to change their behaviour after receiving negative feedback. That can be done by setting up specific goals and timelines for follow up.

For More Information

Please write in to us for more information on our training programs

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