

# The Value of Investing in Employee Communications

By Ellen Voie, reprinted from Logistics Quarterly

Career experts have always recommended that you should dress for the job you strive for. In other words, if your goal is to work your way up in your company your clothing should be similar to those who are in positions above you.

This piece of advice could also apply to your use of language. Using terms and grammar that will help you reach the next level of leadership should be your goal. The way you express yourself will help you influence others in all aspects of your career.

You've probably met someone who appears to strike you as an intelligent individual and then they open their mouth and that image changes in your mind. Not only does your clothing add to the impression you make on others; your choice of words is as (if not more) important in how you are viewed.

Words and how you use them define you. They create an image that others use to judge you and your character. The more intelligent your conversation, the more you will be perceived as being capable and intellectual. Choosing terms that exhibit a larger vocabulary will portray you as being better educated than those who use more elementary language.

A study conducted by California State University researchers David Bennett and Fred Jandt looked at the effect of communication on job success. They found that those who have high levels of "communication apprehension" chose careers that required little human interaction.

Consider the job of a professional driver and the hours of solitude that comprises a typical day. Then, think about your own role in management or as an officer in a corporation and how important your interpersonal relationships are to your success. How challenging is it for a driver to transition from being alone to entering a corporate environment?

If our goal is to encourage and support drivers and to help them find success in their careers, then perhaps we should spend more time helping them become better communicators!

Not only do your drivers have responsibility for your equipment and your freight, but they are also the representatives of your company to the customer. Your drivers are your salespersons and your customer service agents when they arrive at the consignee's door. How he or she communicates will be a reflection on your company.

Bennett and Jandt's research found that the workers with high communication apprehension were "viewed by others more negatively on a number of dimensions than those individuals who are not communication apprehensive." The report continues to state that they are seen as less socially attractive as well as being less competent. These individuals then suffer from lower self-esteem and credibility, which leads to isolation and lack of trust in others.

As an industry, we suffer from many negative stereotypes about the drivers who share the road with the motoring public. Part of this image problem could stem from the need to attract drivers who are independent and are comfortable with less interpersonal communication and long hours alone in a cab. This leads to a driving force that is less likely to advance professionally unless they can overcome any communication apprehension. In the process, their aspirations are limited by their own self-perception and lower confidence.

How can we help drivers overcome any communication apprehension that might limit their success either as a driver or in moving into a corporate role? The researchers discovered that incentives tied to reports of customer service helped reduce workers' level of apprehension. They also learned that when workers understood the importance of their job and how job satisfaction was tied to the knowledge that their service was appreciated, they had less communication apprehension.

The report suggests that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and taking pride in one's work and that workers who feel that their efforts are deemed important have less communication apprehension. The advice to employers is to provide communication training to workers while reinforcing the importance that an individual has to the company's success. They also suggest offering raises tied to customer satisfaction.

Perhaps as an industry we could take this information and change our incentive and training programs to provide more interpersonal communication lessons along with the safety and fuel savings curriculum.

Who knows, it could lead to greater job satisfaction and more driver advancement opportunities!