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Robinson Builders Mart Customer Newsletter

Robinson's Monthly Newsletter

“Expect the best. Prepare for the worst. Capitalize on what comes.”
– Zig Ziglar

August 2020 Newsletter

Contractor Tip Of The Month:

A Learning Moment

Communicating with the New Generation of Construction Employees

Damian Lang - CEO at [Lang Masonry Contractors](#)

Back in the old days, you could tell someone what to do, and they did it. Employees knew construction was a rough and tough business. You could raise your voice, or make harsh comments about an employee's performance, and it was likely he would take what you threw at him and simply keep on working. However, this way of communicating just doesn't work anymore. We recently finished a planning retreat with our foremen, superintendents, and project managers. With 33 people from our management team present, the discussion turned to how to best communicate with the incoming generation of employees. Most of these construction managers have been in the business for many, many years and still remember how things used to be done.

After the meeting, one of our superintendents asked me how it was possible not to raise your voice when employees make the same mistake, time and time again. I told him, if you raise your voice, you lose the message you are trying to communicate. Then I explained that it isn't what you say, as much as the way you say it.

As an example, with a stern voice and a quizzical look on my face, I told him he was doing an excellent job managing his crew. Next, I asked him if he believed the words I said, or what I communicated to him with my voice and facial expressions. He shrugged his shoulders as though he got the point.

As I am writing this article, it has been eight days since we had our talk. I wondered if he would remember what I told him about his performance based on the way I said it. So, I called and asked him if he remembered the conversation we had about communicating with employees at the retreat. He said he did. I asked him if he recalled what I told him about his performance when I gave him an example of how not to communicate with employees. He said, "No, I don't remember what you told me."

I asked him if he would believe it if I said he was doing an excellent job managing his crew. Then, I explained that the reason he never heard what I said, was due to my tone of voice and body language when I conveyed the message to him. I explained that if I would have passionately told him he was doing an excellent job managing his crew, I am certain he would have remembered exactly what I said.

I further explained that when you are directing someone (especially if it is during a disciplinary session), the message he is getting is the way you communicate it to him, not the words you say. After the discussion, the conversation between the employee and his coworkers will not be about what you told him, but how you conveyed the message. He will either tell his coworkers how big of an asshole you are, or that you are a pretty good guy because you treated him with respect.

Studies show that 93% of communication is nonverbal, divided into the following percentages:

- 55% is received through our body language.
- 38% is received through our tone of voice.
- 7% percent is received through the words we say.

Millennials account for 50% of the construction workforce these days. By 2030, they will account for 75%, so I realize we are dealing with a new group of employees. However, these studies go back to at least 1967 – way before this group entered the workforce. So many of us have been communicating wrongly for years, and because of this, we have likely lost relationships and good employees.

So, how do we communicate with coworkers or our employees? Here are some principles of good communication:

- Discipline one-on-one – Disciplining an employee in front of others can lead to embarrassment and distrust.
- Stay cool – Keep your facial expressions and body language comfortable and keep good eye contact with your listener.
- Keep a normal voice tone – If you raise your voice, you could shut the other person down out of fear alone, and he will likely get a different message than what you want to convey.
- Be patient – Even if the employee has made the same mistake over and over. Remember that in my August 2016 contractor tip, I

explained that you must tell someone how to do something 27 times before it becomes automatic.

- Be sincere – If you are not sincere, the employee will see your lack of care for him as a person.
- Ask questions – Ask what is causing the issues instead of telling him the cause. By letting him solve his own problems, you will learn more about him, and he will learn much faster about how to do his job properly.
- Focus on the behavior, not the person himself – Let the employee know you care about him, and you just want to see different results.

Everyone on your team has at least one thing they are good at. To ensure you maintain a good relationship, when you are finished with the conversation, compliment the employee on something he does well. Make sure when you are communicating that you are not saying one thing and displaying another through your facial expressions and tone of voice. If you do, your message can be lost as he will believe the actions you convey instead of your words.

So, the next time there is a crisis at your company, stay calm, cool, and collected in the face of fear. Your communication style will set the tone for those around you, and they will be encouraged to follow your lead. In the end, this will strengthen every single person on your team.

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