

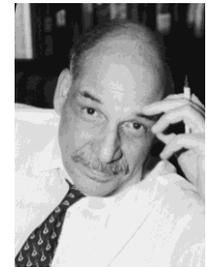
Members Quarterly

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President's Message

Communicating to Succeed

The top of the list of key skills for hiring managers



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I recently read an article in which corporate recruiters were asked to rank the key skills that they were looking for when it came to hiring young managers. Not surprisingly, they said that communication skills and the ability to communicate clearly in particular were at the top of the list. They ranked them above technological knowledge, leadership acumen and the ability to work as a member of a team. When it came to ranking communication skills versus managerial ability, there was no contest. The recruiters favoured applicants with good communication skills by a margin of two to one.

What does this say to me? First, the level of communication skills amongst recent graduates must be very low. Secondly, those who can communicate have a clear and obvious value in the marketplace. Last but not least, we should all be looking at ways to improve our skills in this important area of work and business.

The reason for the dimming of our collective communication lights is pretty simple. We have moved away from teaching our children how to speak or write for public consumption. They may have more knowledge than ever and certainly know much more than we ever did. But they have no capacity to tell anyone else about it, except in wordy and inarticulate blog posts or miniature summaries in text or Twitter portions.

This is particularly problematic when our young brainiacs leave school and enter the workforce because the rest of us don't have time to slow down and listen to their questions. We don't really understand the code that they have developed to speak to each other while in high school or college. Many come into the working world without any ability to have an adult level conversation that doesn't take place through a keyboard or Internet connection. They also have zero experience in making public presentations, even the limited variety that is required of junior employees in a team or group setting.

So how do we shift this paradigm and get the pendulum swinging back towards creating workers with good communication skills? In the short term, this is going to be tough because you can train people in many areas, but training in public speaking and better writing is hard to do in the hectic workplace. I guess it will mean patience on our part and finding employees who are willing to undertake this challenge. For many younger employees, it may mean going back to take on additional training if they want that great job or they want to get ahead.

In the longer term, we will need to talk to the teachers and educators so that learning communication skills becomes more of a priority at every level of the education system. Until we do that, we will continue to have a communication shortage, or at least a shortage of qualified candidates to move into mid-level and senior positions in our organizations.

And remember, as former Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca used to say "You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere."