

# “what we seem to have here is a failure to communicate...”

## “Good management begins with good people”

by Dennis Vicars



Dennis Vicars is presently CEO of Human Services Management Corporation (HSMC) and Executive Director of the Professional Association for Childhood Education

Alternative Payment Program (PACEAPP). Dennis has guided both organizations' growth to where the Professional Association for Childhood Education (PACE) is now the largest early care and education association in California and HSMC has become a significant child care management company. In his career, Dennis Vicars has served as a child care corporate executive, preschool company founder, and advocate on both the public and private side of early childhood education. Dennis has a unique understanding of early childhood education and has experience in every area of the profession. Dennis has been a speaker and workshop host for various organizations including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Child Care Association (NCCA), PACE, and the World Forum on Early Care and Education. Dennis is presently a featured writer in *Exchange* magazine, which is the most recognized early childhood magazine in the world. Dennis has assisted and been a consultant on numerous early care and education advisory boards including Blue Ribbon Commissions in Maryland, Virginia, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona. Dennis served on California's Master Plan for early childhood education and was recently chosen by Governor Schwarzenegger as his representative on the 13-member Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee.

Dennis is presently involved in Sacramento County's Superintendent Preschool Committee and participates on PACE's Public Policy Committee and is President of Child Development Policy Institute (CDPI).

Or so said Paul Newman in the movie, “Cool Hand Luke.”

Communication is probably the most over-used, but least understood term in any organization. If you look at any employee survey, the biggest complaint is “lack of communication by upper management.” How often have you heard, “No one told me that”? Or, how about the familiar phrase, “Well, they don't listen to me.”

First, all organizations can probably do a better job of getting the message out. We are told that in radio advertising one must hear a message seven times before it registers with the brain. The visual message must be seen four to five times before the brain acknowledges and comprehends the intent. So, undoubtedly, we can all do a better job of making sure that needed information is issued repeatedly and in a manner best suited to the intended audience.

However, complaints about lack of communication are too often made by people prone to talking and telling instead of listening and learning. To truly communicate, one has a responsibility to find out what the other party really wants or hopes to achieve. Once this is accomplished, then and only then can you communicate from a position of strength.

Here are a few other ideas for enhancing communication:

- When a person asks a question, let him or her finish even if you know what they are going to ask.
- Demonstrate to the other person that you are listening by focusing your eyes and body language in a positive and open manner.
- Listen to the ‘music’ of the message, as well as the words.
- Show concern and empathy.
- Be willing to repeat, in positive terms, what you think you have heard the person say.
- Give the speaker validation that you understand his or her message or request.

All too often, people are confused about whether they are not being heard or if someone is simply not acting on their suggestions or wishes. A hard lesson for many people is the fact that not getting your way does not mean that your ideas, thoughts, and expressions are not valued. It simply means that rejection is a part of communication as well.

A thriving workplace where people feel empowered is one where everyone's ideas and suggestions are given opportunity for expression. However, not being acted upon is not the same as not being heard.

Lastly, never underestimate the power of words; say what you mean. Let me illustrate this point through the following true story:

Many years ago when I was a high school baseball coach, my team was in the playoffs for a berth in the state championship. Obviously, to have gone this far we had an extremely talented team. In the last inning, our team was leading 2 to 1 with two outs. I called a time-out to go out and talk to our star pitcher after he had walked a batter. The other team's star batter was about to hit and I wanted to make sure my pitcher was reminded of what NOT TO DO. Let me repeat — WHAT NOT TO DO.

I learned an extremely important management lesson that day and unfortunately so did our team. Human beings are incapable of moving away from the reverse of an idea. A negative motivation is simply a motivation to the brain. Our subconscious brain, which is where the motivations for our behaviors dwell, cannot comprehend a "Do, but don't" command. We move forward and toward what we visualize. Research has demonstrated that positively worded statements are one-third easier to comprehend than their negative counterparts.

The next time you hope to achieve a positive action from someone, I would suggest you leave them with a positive comment on what you want, not what you don't want. I often wonder if anyone ever got that baseball that went over the fence and landed on a building roof 400 feet from home plate . . .