

What Business Wants: A Study of Workplace Communication Needs*

Beverly Langford, Ph.D. Clinical Assistant Professor
Program Coordinator, Business Communication Programs
Department of Marketing
J. Mack Robinson College of Business
Georgia State University

Adapted from an original presentation for Association of Business Communications,
with Linda P. Willis, 2007

Representative Companies



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Coca Cola

IBM

Munich American

Reinsurance Corp.

YKK-Corporation of America

Smith and Howard, CPA

Thompson Ventulett and
Stainback Architects

Proctor & Gamble

ING

Trimont Real Estate
Advisors

Kimberly Clark

Vanity Fair Brands (Fruit of
the Loom)

Georgia Power Company

McKesson

The Columns Group (Real
Estate Development)

Raising the Bar (Executive
Coaching Firm Specializing in Law
and Accounting Firms)

Triaxia Partners

Detica Information
Technology

Interview Questions

- What are the attributes of a new hire who has strong communication skills?
- Rank them in order of importance.
- Which two or three of the above-mentioned skills are most critical to your business' success?
- Among new hires, name the areas in which they are most usually deficient?

Interview Responses: Attributes of Strong Communication in New Hires

- Ability to listen
- Knowing how to ask good questions
- Organizing thoughts to present ideas effectively (no rambling; no fillers); incisive speaker
- Being able to close the loop on thoughts
- Taking initiative to get information and to know what they need to be doing
- Flexibility

Interview Responses: Where Usually Deficient

- Don't know how to network
- Can't form relationships—no training in this area
- Poor writing skills
- Limited vocabulary
- Dealing with conflict
- Too much email—inappropriate use

Interview Responses: Importance to Business

- Ability to think and challenge our thinking
- Being able to write clearly at a *business* level rather than an *academic* level
- Be able to communicate upward—no extremes of either too arrogant or too shy

Interview Questions

- Which deficiency(ies) is/are so critical that you provide training to remediate?
- What are example of training (other than job-specific) that you provide for new hires?
- Do you provide training as needed, or for everyone?
- On a scale of 1-5, how successful is the training in eliminating the problem?

Interview Response: Training

- Mixed responses
- Little measurement
- Little targeted training

One Response

“We don’t remediate. We have a strict interview process that weeds out as many problems as possible.”

Exception



Presentation Skills Training
One response: “We can train them.”

Business School Communication Classes Should Emphasize (1-5)

- Writing formal reports and proposals
- Writing emails
- High-Structure (formal) presentations
- Low-Structure presentations (informal speaking, conducting meetings, giving feedback, reporting on projects)
- Social interaction (business etiquette, professional behavior, conduct in social situations, building relationships)

Business School Communication Classes Should Emphasize (Collected Responses In Order of Importance)



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- Social interaction (business etiquette, professional behavior, conduct in social situations, building relationships) #1
- Writing emails #2
- Low-Structure presentations (informal speaking, conducting meetings, giving feedback, reporting on projects) #3
- Writing formal reports and proposals #4
- High-Structure (formal) presentations #5

Advice for Business School Course Developers



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“Require subject-matter mastery. Demand a lot of speaking, reporting, and interacting.”

“Stress building of relationships.”

“Write to the point, especially emails.”

“Bring in outside speakers.”

Advice for Business School Course Developers



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“Focus on teaching them facilitation skills.”

“Writing more simply doesn’t mean bad grammar.”

“Expose them to real-world situations with field studies and projects.”

“Learn the importance of a first impression.”

Conclusions

- Companies are putting emphasis on building and managing relationships
- New hires need the confidence to develop and sustain conversations at all levels of the organization
- Formal presentations aren't as critical as originally thought
- Many companies don't train in interpersonal skills
- Those that do train don't know how to measure

Conclusions

- “Communication skills” doesn’t mean the same thing to everyone
- Executives aren’t always sure about what they expect
- Executives have some difficulty tying the communication skills (or lack thereof) to business goals