

1.4.10: Becoming a Better Employee

Learning Objectives

Discuss how effective communication improves you as an employee

Communication is something we often take for granted but not often something we think to improve. And yet, being a good communicator can open doors for you as an employee, make you more valuable to your employer and help you get ahead.

Think about the tree swing in Figure 1. The creation of that swing started out all wrong and then got worse from there.

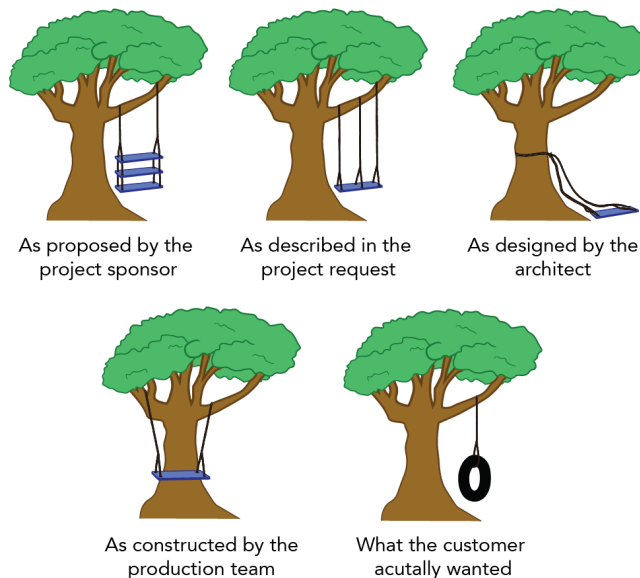


Figure 1. This common example of a tree swing shows just how things can go wrong as you create a new product or service. (CC BY; Lumen Learning)

Let's approach that process as though you were in charge. How could you have been a better employee and improved that result with better communication? We'll look at it step by step.

- 1. Meeting with the project sponsor:** As the sales associate of this tree swing, you met with the project sponsor, Mark, and heard his translation of the customer's wishes. Mark very clearly told you he wanted a swing with three seats, one on top of another. Now, you're an expert on tree swings. Does his request make sense? This is an effective communication opportunity. You could have asked questions, clarified and repeated back what Mark was telling you. You could have told him that this kind of swing design was highly unusual and not generally embraced by tree swing aficionados. An opportunity to engage in effective communication with the customer was missed.
- 2. Specifying the project request:** This is where you, as swing sales person, made your first mistake. Rather than requesting three seats, you requested three ropes to secure the swing to the tree. This is another effective communication opportunity. You could have proofread and double-checked to make sure your request matched Mark's request, but you did not. An opportunity to ensure effective communication via reinforcement and repetition was missed.
- 3. Designing, production and installation:** Here's where the project went from wrong to wrong-er. Your swing production team not only didn't question your request for three ropes, they went off and did their own thing with the concept and design of the product. The architect misunderstood your request completely. The production team reviewed the architect's request and knew his design wasn't functional, and so made their own changes. Finally, the installation team got there and the product wouldn't work without additional reinforcements, so they did what was needed to make the product functional. This is another effective communication opportunity. Not only did they miss opportunities to communicate with each other, but you missed an opportunity for follow-up, reinforcement and repetition.

Your manager, Gloria, is going to get calls from customers, and when she's done hearing their complaints, is she going to think you're employee of the year? Probably not. You didn't deliver good results.

Employees who communicate effectively by listening, repeating, reinforcing and following up avoid all these issues. They are presented with a problem, they take in all the necessary information, and then they direct their teams with messaging that is

- Clear
- Concise
- Objective
- Consistent
- Complete
- Relevant
- Considerate of the knowledge his audience possesses

Because of better communication, they become better team members, co-workers, and employees.

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