

It's time to invest in professional communication

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"There is no quick fix for developing professional communication skills."



This statement is not good news for any organisation or entrepreneur. After, all, when a skills gap is identified, it needs to be fixed – and fast!

Unfortunately, a three-day business writing course, or a two-day presentation skills workshop will not develop or deliver the required professional communication skills. At most, these courses provide exposure to the skills. Organisations often argue that training is limited by budget or staff time constraints. In this case, number targets may be met but the return on investment is minimal and a substantial improvement in communication skills will not be evident in your organisation.

Developing and applying skills requires:

- exposure to them
- recognition of prior learning
- opportunities for practice and production of skills
- review and self-reflection of the learning, including opportunities to make mistakes, interrogate these mistakes and then try again
- redoing and redoing

For many people, particularly when developing communication skills, undoing prior learning is a first and major challenge to overcome – over time, we learn communication patterns and habits that need to be changed.

The human brain embeds learning through connections between its approximately 100 billion neurons as neural pathways and networks. When developing a skill, the human brain physically creates or strengthens pre-existing neural pathways related to the skill. So, brief exposure to a new skill without embedding it does not result in skills development.

Consider how many times a baby must try walking before getting it right or how long it might have taken you to learn how to drive a car before you were able to do it. Learning a skill may require movement across four stages:

- unconscious incompetence (you don't know what you don't know),
- conscious incompetence (you know what you don't know),
- conscious competence (you know that you know), and
- unconscious competence (you just do).

Once we're up and walking as human beings, do we ever have to really think about how to walk or do we just do it? If you've been driving for years, do you spend time thinking about how to turn the steering wheel or apply the brakes? Probably not!

In developing communication skills, a professional should want to achieve at least conscious competence and, eventually, unconscious competence. As an organisation or an entrepreneur, time spent in skills development programmes with thorough opportunity for practice and production of the skills results in a more noticeable, quantifiable, and real return on investment.

Effective professional communication skills develop personal and thus business confidence and engenders a far greater likelihood of spontaneous daily application by employees of these skills so heavily invested in by their organisation.

Effective skills development also means that professional communication is quicker – both in compilation of messages and understanding by the receivers. Ultimately, all of this translates into long-term cost savings and business efficiency. A bit more time spent in skills development, therefore, yields exponential results and is a worthwhile investment for any organisation.

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