

Good communication can unlock returns for careers and organisations

Issued by UCT Graduate School of Business

7 Sep 2009

The UCT Graduate School of Business is launching a new course to give people in business a unique opportunity to brush up on their communication skills - an often overlooked but increasingly important business proficiency in today's communication-driven world.



Course Director, Barbara Fölscher

This comes after new research has shown that improving communication can unlock great bottom line returns for businesses.

The study - released in March by Siemens Enterprise Communications and surveying over 500 companies in the USA, India, Russia, Brazil, Germany, Italy, France and the UK - revealed that poor communication can cost a 100-strong company the equivalent of €4 140 (about R46 000) for every employee each year.

The study highlights just how important communication skills are in modern organisations. Improving communication can make a tremendous difference to the bottom line, particularly in tough economic times when every cent counts.

This is the view of Barbara Fölscher, Director of the new High Impact Presentation and Writing Skills course launching at the UCT Graduate School of Business from 2nd - 4th November. She believes the importance of good communication in the business world cannot be underestimated.

"While the plethora of technology available today, from email to PowerPoint, creates many channels through which to communicate, being an able user of these channels and essentially an effective communicator is another matter altogether," said Fölscher.

"Research shows that much more consideration needs to be paid to how people communicate with colleagues, employees and clients - whether through emails and telephone calls, text messages, meetings and presentations or speeches. These are now daily, routine tasks - but just how well are they being performed?" she asked.

In South Africa, a country with eleven official languages, Fölscher added that daily frustrations in communication are not uncommon - especially in the workplace where English dominates but is not equally understood by everyone.

"Miscommunications, undecipherable emails, jargon-jammed reports - all of these are sapping the time, energy and resources of organisations all over the country, every day. Too little attention is paid to what we say and how we say it - emails are typed in haste, while speakers fail to engage their audiences properly," she said.

The UCT GSB course will address these often-overlooked issues by giving delegates 'tools for life'. The course is run at several other top international business schools and Fölscher said that the demand is growing, even during the recession.

"The course offers something powerful and of high quality, and will equip people and organisations with skills that will get results," she said.

"It will enable them to deliver high-impact presentations and hone writing skills to ensure that their message is heard, understood and acted upon every time. Delegates will also be given an opportunity to develop structure, style and a planning process that suits their own needs," she added.

Fölscher, who is well placed to direct the course - with over two decades of journalistic experience and having offered similar programmes at the London Business School and Saïd Business School at Oxford University - said poor communication can pose a real threat to organisations and careers and even create something of a glass ceiling.

“Whatever one's profession or level, be it in business, an NGO or in government, the skills of effective communication are a necessity. It's no surprise that it remains at the top of the list of what matters most to recruiters,” she said.

“People who cannot communicate effectively, no matter what their level of technical skill, might find their career progression limited if they cannot express themselves or inspire others through their words.”

At more senior levels these professional communication skills are equally as important.

Another survey, performed by the SSP BPI Group in December 2008 in 14 countries, said that emphasising and building leadership communication was one of three key skill areas to deal with economic pressures from the recession in the workplace:

“The hallmark of great leadership is organisational communication. Organisations should always practice timely, honest communication to build trust and confidence with their teams. The need for skilled communication is even more magnified when times are tough. Employees want to understand the issue, what's being done to address the situation and what it means to them,” said the report.

Fölscher added that many managers spend countless hours preparing and making presentations, but how many of those presentations actually provide any more insight than a printed report?

“A presentation is an important channel of communication in business - but most people are not trained to use this channel well. Too often, they focus only on the words and ignore crucial aspects of communication such as body language and voice.”

Fölscher advised that some key things to avoid when writing include: long sentences, jargon or complicated language, and taking too long to get to the main point.

“You need to always write and speak from the listener/reader's perspective - don't try to sound too clever at their expense.”

High Impact Presentation and Writing Skills runs at the UCT Graduate School of Business this November. Call 021 406 1323 or SMS 'writing' and your email address to 31497 for more information.

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