



3805 N. High St./Suite 310 Columbus, Ohio 43214

Phone: 614-784-8530 Fax: 614-784-8531

[www.integratedleader.com](http://www.integratedleader.com)

## **You Just Don't Understand!**

By M.J. Clark, APR

Have you ever said something to another person, but that person interprets the message as something else entirely? It's easy in this situation to get defensive. "That's not what I meant," you might say. "You misunderstood the message." Communication is about shared meaning. Without the two parties coming to an agreement about the meaning, there is no communication. How a person receives your message is as important as the message itself.

So how do people typically receive our messages? What goes into a message? Albert Mehrabian, currently Professor Emeritus of Psychology at UCLA, conducted experiments on the sharing of feelings and attitudes in 1971 and came to two conclusions. First, he concluded that three main elements are present in any face-to-face communication: words we say, tone of voice and body language. Second, he concluded that of these three elements, the meaning of the message is primarily understood by receivers through body language (55%), followed by tone of voice (38%), followed by the words we say (7%).

For communication to be effective, and to promote understanding, these three aspects of the message must be congruent. When we say something insincere, our body language or tone of voice may give us away. This is confusing to a listener, because they are receiving mixed messages. As Mehrabian found, our non-verbals are a strong indicator of how people receive our messages, so listeners may default to paying more attention to our non-verbals than the words we say, and act on the message we are non-verbally sending.

This is why authentic communication is so important. Messages can be sent and received more clearly when we are in harmony with what we are saying. As we begin to express ourselves authentically in business settings, we can chart productivity increases, improvement in morale, staff retention improvements, relationship improvements, decline in political maneuvers, an increase in employee engagement and an increase in overall quality of life for those involved. With authentic communication comes peace of mind, but it's initially tough to communicate through the politics and game playing we often face in business.

So how can we work toward authentic communication? We can start by understanding what motivates team members. Team members want interesting work. They want to

know they are appreciated. They want to feel “in the loop.” How can you, as a manager or leader, help motivate them and communicate more productively with them?

- Challenge your team members with work assignments. Give them feedback on what they did well and what they can do to improve. Don't wait until their annual evaluation. Giving feedback now will allow them to begin making improvements immediately, which ultimately helps your business.
- Pay attention to what employees do right, and compliment them in a timely manner. We are often quick to point out mistakes, but how often do we take the time to write a quick note of thanks to a colleague or pull someone aside after a meeting to tell them we appreciated their thoughtful comments?
- Communicate with employees about business matters and seek their input. When employees feel connected to a company, their loyalty increases.

If you take the first step in opening up lines of communication with employees, they will feel more at liberty to communicate more honestly and authentically with you. As trust is built and appreciation shared, the ground work is laid for authentic communication to take place more regularly, and your business will have a chance to truly flourish. In an environment of honest, productive communication, it is easier for everyone involved to find peace and joy in coming to work each day.

