KEY WORDS AT KEY TIMES

WORDS MATTER

Communication is critical to the wellbeing of individuals within an organization and to teams. We have access to many communication tools not available to us in previous decades. Email, text, social media, virtual conferencing, team apps, phone and face to face interactions are all combined to form rich opportunities for communication. The different methods of communication have not changed the primary function of communication. We want to send a message that will be easily understood and interpreted correctly.

Words matter in the effective communication of a message. Just as grammatical errors send certain implied, negative messages to the receiver, so do the words we choose or the length of the communication. Certain words or phrases convey specific messages. For example, what do you gather from this message: "Why didn't you finish this? It was due Friday?" Could the communication be more effective with different words? How about: "What challenges did you face with the project? Are extra resources needed? How can I help you avoid being late with project completion?" Language can build a barrier between people or help create more opportunity for engagement. How do we do the latter?

INTENDED OUTCOME

As we strive to communicate effectively, we think about the outcome we want from the communication. Thinking ahead is so important to helping you choose your words well, regardless of the communication tool used. We call this effort Key Words at Key Times. Deliver the right message in the right way to the right person at the right time.

Using Key Words at Key Times, creates a more positive relationship and reduces anxiety for the receiver of the communication. We can use key words to introduce ourselves to others, explain the purpose for meetings, procedures, or next steps. Key words help strengthen relationships with customers, peers, colleagues, friends, and family. We can focus and practice key words with every communication.

FRAMING COMMUNICATION

Key words at key times are used in all communication situations – email, conversation, social media. Today's communication options are instantly delivered, never disappear, and cannot be easily taken back. The importance of considering what you intend to accomplish with a communication is the first step. Consider your audience and how they receive messages. Then, think about how to frame your communication to successfully achieve the outcome and leave the receiver pleased with the conversation, as well.

Leaders and colleagues are often in situations that involve difficult conversations or performance feedback. These conversations do not have to be adversarial in nature. Feedback can be delivered using key words that are not disrespectful or punitive. This type of communication also requires advanced

thought. We would want to begin our conversation with the positives noted about the employee's job performance before beginning to address the areas noted for growth. What is the context? How will we frame the conversation to accomplish our goal for improved performance? These are the questions we ask ourselves as we plan for the conversation. If the conversation occurs in the moment, practice is the best way to ensure that we use key words and take care to send the right message. The more we think about how we frame our messages, the more skilled we become at consistently using key words at key times to support stronger relationships and better communicated messages.

How we say something is as important as what we say. The intonation and expression used sends a distinct message. Consider the chart below. Notice the importance of Tone of voice in both face-to-face communication and conversations by phone. In face-to-face conversations, Tone and Look deliver the message.

DIMENSION	COMMUNICATION CUE	FACE-TO-FACE	OVER THE PHONE
VERBAL	Choice of **WORDS**	**7%** of what people believe is based on the words they hear.	**13%** of what people believe is based on the words they hear.
VOCAL	**TONE** of voice	**38%** of what people believe is based on how the words are spoken.	**86%** of what people believe is based on how the words are spoken.
VISUAL	**LOOK** of the communication	**55%** of what people believe is based on what people see in another person.	**1%** of what people believe is based on what people see in another person.