

Communicating with **NANCY STERN**

COMMUNICATION PLUS

Improv Skills for Improved Communication At Work, At Home, Wherever

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*"These are days
when no one
should rely un-
duly on his com-
petence. Strength
lies in improvisa-
tion.*

-Walter Benjamin
German Theologian
1892-1940

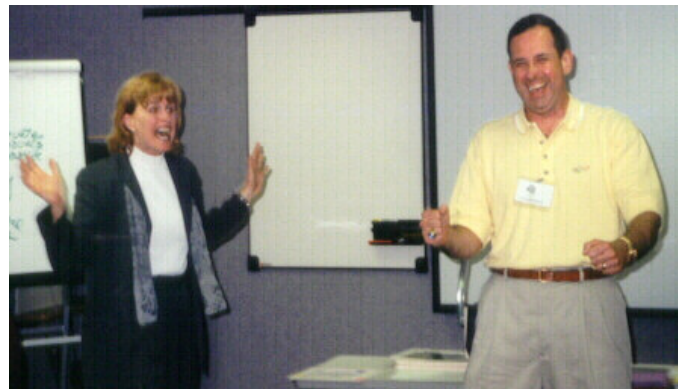
Noted management consultant Tom Peters said, "*Leadership is improv.*"

When I first saw that in an article he wrote for Fast Company about leadership qualities, I stopped and thought about everything I learned while studying improv with the well known theatre group, Second City.

Since life doesn't come with a rule book, the script will eventually hit the fan and when that happens, improvisation can be a good way to go. There are three basic "rules" to follow.

Number One: **There are No NOs.** Say yes to whatever comes your way. Explore all of your options. Don't block ideas or proposals. Modify, add, revise or expand. Allow yourself to make mistakes. Be open to everything!

Number Two: **Be Here Now.** It has been said, "*Wherever you go, there you are.*" That's good advice and yet, how easy



*Improv at Work in Norfolk Virginia : Naval Facilities
Engineering Command Atlantic*

is it to really **be** wherever you are? We get distracted and often forget the power of the present moment. Stay focused. Listen. Reflect what you hear so the listener knows you are there. Don't multi-task. Be present with whatever you're doing or whoever you're with.

Number Three: **Let Go & Flow.** When things happen that you cannot control, let go and flow. Ask yourself what might happen next? What can you really control? Focus your attention there, on the things you can do something about. Allow new ideas to come in.

When I teach improv to business people they experience seriously fun ways to improv(e) their flexibility, embrace change, and breeze through problems. Improv helps them think on their feet, be creative and innovative, listen carefully, become a captivating speaker or presenter, and get the most out of every moment. It's great for promoting teamwork, reducing stress, developing resilience, and creating dynamic leaders. Participation in the workshop challenges one's spontaneity, imagination and intuition. Plus, people laugh while they learn and that's a good thing.

How Much Change Have You Had Lately?

Circle each change listed below that you have experienced in the past two years:

1. I have a new job.
2. I have many new job responsibilities.
3. I have new coworkers.
4. I have a new boss.
5. My work environment has changed.
6. I received a promotion.
7. I did not receive an expected promotion.
8. I now supervise my former peers.
9. I must use a new or different technology.
10. My organization rapidly expanded.
11. My organization merged with another organization.
12. My organization reduced its workforce.
13. My organization has high employee turnover.
14. My organization has fewer customers than in the past.
15. My organization went public.
16. My organization has new policies and expectations.
17. My organization seems to be in a different business now.
18. My team or department reorganized.
19. My organization reorganized.
20. My organization is facing fierce competition.
21. I lost my job because of a layoff.
22. I changed careers.

TOTAL:

If you have circled fewer than ten, you are experiencing low levels of change. Ten to fifteen means you are in the norm for how much change people are experiencing these days. Change can be a good way to grow, but sixteen or more means you are in Change Overload and that's not good. Do what you can to reduce the changes going on simultaneously. Remember that too much change all at once can be stressful and cause illness. Be sure to find "alone time" to exercise, be outdoors, meditate, read, etc.

Assessments A to Z by Bonnie Burn and Maggi Payment.
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"We don't want disturbances, we don't want a different point of view, we don't want diversity, because we think if we keep it stable, we'll be safe. But a system that is stable is closest to death."

—Margaret Wheatley
Lessons From the New Workplace



*"Change your
thoughts and you
change your world."*

-Norman Vincent Peale

Email Your Questions to Nancy@nancystern.com

Q *Every time we implement a change in the organization like a new process or a policy, my direct reports give me a hard time. They still seem to oppose anything that is associated with change. What can I do?*

A Change is the only thing in life we can count on and yet, people fear it, resist it and will go out of their way to avoid it. What if you shifted the paradigm a bit? What is change, really? Isn't it just another way of doing or being that, more often than not, winds up to be better? What if you stop talking about it as if it were the enemy and simply call it what it is really is—a solution to a problem. Problem-solving is challenging. So is change. Problem-solving is necessary. So is change. And, like change, problem solving is what we do at work. The term problem-solving has a much more positive connotation.

When people hear the word change

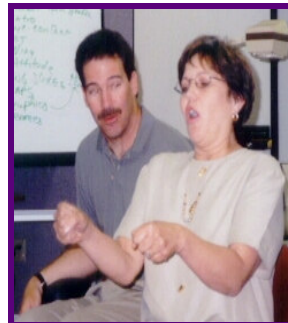
the first thought is usually, *"What will I have to give up?"* With the term problem-solving, first thoughts more likely will be, *"What will I gain?"* The best way to motivate and inspire people to "buy in to the change" is to involve them in the problem-solving process. Then, how you communicate will be vitally important.

For starters, be sure employees understand what the problem is and why a solution is necessary. Then be sure you keep everyone up to speed about the process for implementing the solution (aka the change). Explain all delays that may occur and let people know why things are the way they are. Show empathy and let people know you know it's a difficult time for them. Make yourself available for individual's concerns and be as open as you possibly can. Just remember "Shift Happens" and being flexible is the key to success.

"Be the change you want to see in the world."

-Mahatma Gandhi

Improv in Action: *A Workshop of Engineers in Virginia*



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Because how you say what you say, matters.™

www.nancystern.com

Phone: 858-792-2768
Fax: 858-792-2745
Email: nancy@nancystern.com

Whether you're experiencing change, managing people, connecting with customers and co-workers, or making presentations, getting your message across effectively is vital to your success.

Nancy Stern custom designs keynotes, breakouts and educational programs to enhance communication effectiveness; to help increase productivity, profitability and peace of mind; and to impact the bottom line where it matters most—with results.

Programs & Topics Include:

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- Shift Happens: Managing the Dynamics of Change
- Team Building for Productivity
- Generations Jive: Intergenerational Communication Tips™
- Should You Stay or Should You Grow? Reaping the Rewards of Risk-Taking™

Why Nancy Stern?

Nancy Stern, MA is the president/owner and senior consultant of Communication Plus, a consulting firm in San Diego specializing in leadership and employee development. Since 1972, she has taught thousands the art and science of effective communication. She is a former columnist with the *San Diego Daily Transcript* and has taught at the University of California San Diego and San Diego State University Management Development Center.

She inspires managers, employees and individuals of all ages through the

simple, yet powerful, lesson that *how you say what you say, matters™*. Personal experiences form the foundation of her programs, creating presentations that are personal, professional and practical. The result: Improvement of the "whole person" and therefore, the "whole organization."

She is an EMMY award-winner, who produced and appeared in the national PBS television series *Communicating With Nancy Stern* (1990-95) and she is the coauthor of *101 Stupid Things Trainers Do To Sabotage Success*.

Nancy holds a Master of Arts degree in Communication Education from Michigan State University and is a member of the American Society for Training and Development and the National Speakers Association.



Nancy Stern