

Communicating with **NANCY STERN**

COMMUNICATION PLUS

Forest Service New Employees Get Tips About How to Connect with Customers

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Hundreds of new employees of the US Forest Service convened in Sacramento for a week of orientation. Keynote speaker Nancy Stern spoke for an hour about the importance of connecting with both internal and external customers.

She mentioned the concept of "moments of truth" and said, "A *moment of truth* can be anything that is communicated to an observer about the organization. Moments can be magical or miserable. A dirty office, a dead plant, and an unanswered phone all send negative messages."

Since Stern customizes her programs, she gave Forest Service examples about how to make magic



moments. Each year the Forest Service provides Smokey Bear calendars for people who visit some of the nations forests. She told the story of a receptionist who got to know one of the elderly customers because she came in each year for the calendar. To make a

magic moment for this customer, she took her address and as soon as the calendars came out again, she mailed one to this lady. It resulted in a very nice thank-you note and a boost in employee morale .

"We need to re-imagine what an effective leader is. The re-imagining needs to go from the leader as hero to the leader as host—the person who convenes others so that their creativity, generosity of spirit and good ideas make up the substance of the work."

-Meg Wheatley

Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time

Gender Jive: If We're Going to Work Together, We Need to Talk Together

As behavioral psychologist Carl Rogers said, *"The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or to disapprove."* Approval

usually comes when my *perceptions* of your behavior match my *assumptions* of how I think you *should* behave. It's time to stop *should-ing* on each other and begin to ACCEPT each other with

our differences. This doesn't mean we always have to agree with each other; just accept. People perceive things differently due to differences in cultural/ethnic background, personal experiences,

personality, gender differences, attitudes, beliefs, etc. This diversity may impact our ability to communicate with each other. Therefore, it is important to keep an open mind about such differences so we can reduce the probability of communication breakdown. A deeper awareness of how differently men and women communicate is necessary in order to prevent these gender differences from leading to resentment, decreased productivity and workplace stress.

Research indicates men and women are socialized differently and consequently have diverse styles of speaking. In her best-selling book, *You Just Don't Understand—Women and Men in Conversation*, Deborah Tannen says the sexes often speak virtually different languages. She calls it "report talk" vs. "rapport talk."

Men and women, and their different languages

Men tend to use "report talk" to convey information and self-importance, while women tend to use "rapport talk" to establish intimacy and connection. Tannen says that women will then see men as self-centered and domineering, while men will then see women as illogical and insecure. What results? Accusations that are hurtful. Men will accuse women of asking for advice and then not taking it, of rambling on about nothing, and of being unable to make decisions. Women will accuse men of not listening, invalidating their feelings, and always stepping in to solve problems with a lot of "*you shoulds*."

Speaking different languages at work

In the workplace, these differences impact the way messages are sent and received, thus causing communication breakdown, misunderstanding and major frustration. For example, a female supervisor seeks conversation from her male boss about a problem situation she is having with one of her employees. Her intent for the meeting is to inform her boss of the problem. She just wants him to listen to her, rephrase and repeat what she's saying so that she can become more clear on how she wishes to proceed. Perhaps he would ask her some probing questions about options, etc. Instead, he begins telling her what *she should* do with the problem employee. She becomes frustrated and leaves, feeling her time was wasted. He feels he has solved the problem, and it's time to move on.

...and then at home

Taking this situation into the home, the wife wishes to discuss a problem she's having with her husband, and he jumps in with the solution before she has had a chance to process her options. She gets mad and leaves the room saying, "*You just never listen!*"

An immediate translation is what's needed

In both scenarios, some very important communication skills are sorely lacking. First of all, the woman needs to be up front about what she wants from the man. "*I'd really appreciate it if you'd help me process this problem by listening and asking questions,*" is one way for her to be clear in the beginning of the conversation. If she decides she wants his advice, then she can ask for it. If she doesn't tell him what she wants in the beginning, then he would be wise to ask, "*Do you want my advice or just someone to listen to you?*"

Having a deeper awareness of gender differences will help you increase understanding, and decrease tension while improving productivity and teamwork.

Only by understanding each other's conversational styles and our own options can we begin to realize our opportunities.

—Deborah Tannen

Email Your Questions to Nancy@nancystern.com

Q Our company is growing and we want to be sure the people we hire are a good fit with our mission, vision and values. In the past, we have encountered difficulties with people who have not fit with our culture. Do you have any suggestions?

A The best way to hire smart is to be real clear about the core values you are seeking. What is important to you and your company? Honesty? Integrity? Sense of humor? Intelligence? Enthusiasm? A willingness to learn? Regardless of what's on your list, the next step is to design interview questions that will reflect the candidate's values.

Think about the interview process differently. Instead of making it about you being tasked with filling a

position, make it about the applicant looking for a place to bring his/her unique experiences. Create an environment that is conducive to conversation (around a table or in chairs at a 90° angle). Think "dialogue" rather than "I ask—you answer." Include things like, *"Tell me about a time when you were faced with...What did you do?"* Fill in the blank with something specific that relates to your culture and the challenges you are facing.

Look into the eyes of the candidate—connect at a deeper level and trust your intuition. If you get any "icky" feelings, trust them and move on to another applicant. If you get a strong vibe that this person would fit in great but the resume is lacking in a few areas that can be taught, hire now, teach later.

Personal ethics and one's ability to communicate clearly are foundations for high performance.

You Won't Just Sit There

To illustrate points made during her presentations, Nancy gets volunteers to help. Audiences love to see their coworkers participating. And, it doesn't stop there. All audience members get involved either by talking with each other to reinforce learning points or by silently reflecting and making journal notes. In training classes or during keynotes, the audience won't just sit there.



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Because how you say what you say, matters.™

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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:

- How You Say What You Say Matters™
- Leadership Dynamics™
- Connecting with Customers™
- Powerful Presentations
- Facilitate to Motivate and Manage Conflict™
- Maximize Meeting Results™
- You Can't Leave Home Without You™
- Communicate with Impact!™
- Gender Jive™
- Improv(e) Your Life™
- Facing the News Media
- Shift Happens: Managing the Dynamics of Change
- Team Building for Productivity

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.

