



## **Does Your Next Generation of Leaders Possess These Critical Communication Skills?**

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A lot has been written over the past decade years about the looming federal government leadership gap. As organizations grapple with how to bridge the gap, they're looking at issues such as how to attract Millennials and how to find future leaders with the right experience and technical skills. However, one common denominator to leadership success that needs to be addressed, and is often ignored or an afterthought, is identifying future leaders who either possess critical leadership communication skills.

Regardless of a leader's technical field, agency, or education level, and despite the technological advances that give us so many more options to "distribute" our communication, the ability to communicate effectively in a face-to-face situation can determine the difference between success or failure for a leader. If organizations aren't taking a critical look at a future leader's communication skills, they are putting the success of that leader, and the entire organization, at risk.

# **The following six communication skills are critical to every leader's success.**

If an employee is being considered for hire or promotion to a leadership position, it's important to ensure that he or she either has the following key skills, or that you have a development plan in place to help him or her acquire those skills quickly.

## **1. Intrapersonal Communication Skills**

Intrapersonal communication is the communication we have with ourselves inside our own heads. It includes the things we worry about, thinking through possible solutions to a problem, planning a conversation we'll have later in the day, criticizing ourselves for a mistake we've made, praising ourselves for a job well done, and more. Intrapersonal communication can increase self-confidence, give leaders the opportunity to practice challenging conversations, allow them to analyze and challenge assumptions, provide emotional understanding and the first steps toward control, and can even help minimize procrastination.

## **2. Emotional Awareness and Control**

In my years working both within government organizations and as a consultant, I have seen all kinds of bad behavior in leaders when it comes to expressing their feelings. I've seen employees buried under a mountain of profanity, sarcastic leaders who belittle others, and the opposite extreme- leaders who are too weak to express the seriousness of a situation and how they feel about it. Leaders who act out their emotions are destined to fail. Leaders who learn to communicate their emotions will not only be more successful, but are perceived as more honest and genuine to those around them.

## **3. Interpersonal Communication Skills**

Interpersonal communication is one-on-one communication between two people. It is essential that leaders have the ability to communicate one-on-one with their leaders, those they lead, customers, vendors, and the public, both face-to-face, on the telephone, and via written communication, such as email. Interpersonal communication includes skills such as ***empathy, listening, nonverbal communication, word choice, context, social awareness, self-management, and tailoring a message to the receiver.***

#### **4. Public Speaking Skills**

Even if a leader never has to give a formal, public presentation, a lack of public speaking skills can hinder his or her ability to conduct a meeting, present ideas to staff, and advocate for their department or organization to upper leadership. For those who do speak in a public forum, it's even more critical that they receive formal public speaking training and practice to ensure they can communicate their messages effectively and represent their agency in a positive and professional way.

#### **5. Conflict Resolution Skills**

Similar to #2 above, I've seen a lot of leaders in my day who create unnecessary conflict with themselves and individual employees as well as between employees. Most people don't look forward to conflict and see it as a negative. A leader with great conflict resolution skills sees conflict as an opportunity to get things out in the open and solve problems. However, it takes specific understanding of individual conflict styles, the conflict process, and how to hold conflict discussions to reap the benefits of a positive outcome from a conflict situation.

#### **6. Effective Coaching and Feedback Skills**

If your next generation of leaders' idea of feedback is the annual performance appraisal, you're in trouble. It's critical that leaders be able to effectively provide DAILY coaching and feedback to employees, peers, and supervisors. This includes redirecting poor performance, feedback to maintain good performance, and praise to reward excellent performance.

Bottom line, excellent communication is the most important key to any leader's success. If you want your organization to succeed once you've moved on and the next generation has taken over, you need to prepare them to "take the reins," by helping them master these and other critical communication skills.

*Amy Castro is a workplace communication expert, speaker, trainer, and writer of [The Performance Communication Blog](#). She also authored the book, [Practical Communication-25 Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Getting Along and Getting Things Done](#).*

*For more information on workshops and programs she offers, including the ICTS Supervisor Academy and "Growing and Cultivating Your Next Generation of Leaders", "Assertiveness for Leaders," and more, go to [www.amy-castro.com](http://www.amy-castro.com).*

