

Shrinking Attention Spans are Damaging Communication Skills

It's almost unanimous: 99 percent of business people agree that attention spans are shorter today than three years ago, and this is having a damaging effect on verbal communications skills in the workplace. That's according to a new survey by Connie Dieken, a leadership communication coach. Dieken's survey of 400 business professionals offers a modern look at how communication skills and attention spans are linked. According to the survey, the major consequences of shrinking verbal skills are:

1. Weak relationships with colleagues and peers (72 percent); and
2. Diminished ability to manage and motivate direct reports (69 percent).

Interpersonal skills are plummeting at an alarming rate. The results of this survey are a wake-up call to the impact that shrinking attention spans are having on our ability to lead and influence others, said Dieken. There's been a dramatic decline in how people are relating to one another and, as a result, people are tuning each other out, ruining relationships, bombing job interviews, and tanking business presentations.

Workers blame multitasking. Multitasking (such as checking e-mails and voice-mails or texting during face-to-face communications) was selected by 93 percent of survey respondents as the leading cause of today's declining skills. The second biggest contributor (said 54 percent of survey takers) is that it's become much more difficult to break through today's overwhelming clutter of information.

Further examples from the survey pinpoint how people are failing to communicate effectively today:

- Rambling or taking too long to get to the point is the major reason why people fail to connect with others, according to 71 percent of respondents.
- Overloading with too much information is the biggest reason why people do not properly convey their messages, according to 79 percent of respondents.
- Not explaining why they want others to commit to their cause is the biggest reason why people do not convince others to take action, according to 60 percent of respondents.

The No. 1 verbal communication skill that business people feel they themselves need to improve is to *convince* others to personally commit and take the actions they want, selected by 37 percent of respondents; followed closely by their own need to convey their messages better (36 percent); and their need to improve how they connect with listeners to gain attention (27 percent).

Improving communication skills in today's information-overload, attention-deficit, distraction-driven world boils down to three high-performance habits, says Dieken. They are to:

1. **Connect** with others to engage and instantly capture their attention;
2. **Convey** and nail messages without overloading or confusing others; and
3. **Convince** others to take the action you want and feel good about it.

Source: Connie Dieken, is a leadership communication coach, Emmy® award-winning journalist, and author of the upcoming book, *Talk Less, Say More: 3 Habits to Influence Others and Make Things Happen*. (Wiley, September 2009) (www.TalkLessBook.com).

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