

Tips for Communicating in Times of Stress

Sylvia Henderson

Use skills that enable you to communicate effectively at home and in business as an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. When you are stressed you are less inclined to use skills that do not come naturally to you. You are more inclined to mis-communicate—or not communicate at all—with people who most need your communications. Regularly practice good communications skills to make these skills an integral part of your behavior. You will then be able to call upon those skills "naturally" when you most need them.

Some of us thrive on short-term stress. Our adrenaline levels increase and we become more productive. Others of us "stress-out" and feel tense, fear, pressure, anxiety or other stress-related feelings. Over the long term even the most stress-tolerant person feels fatigue, exhaustion, depression, burnout, or breakdown when experiencing long periods of stress in uncertain times. During stressful situations we communicate with people when we least feel like doing so.

The following suggestions help you to communicate in stressful situations.

- **Gain control of your voice.** People can hear panic, concern, uncertainty, and fear in your voice even when your words say otherwise. Make an extra effort to keep your voice calm by closing your eyes and taking a couple of deep breaths before you speak. Telling people to calm themselves when your own voice communicates "be afraid" exacerbates the situation.
- **Keep your body in check.** Limit the extent to which you pace back and forth as pacing communicates nervousness. Avoid clutching objects because clutching conveys fear. Nervous tics become more pronounced when you are under stress. They are difficult, if impossible, to control but some people can control tics when they focus on trying to do so. Remember that your body language reveals more about your stressful feelings than the words you speak.
- **Plan ahead.** If you are not usually a contingency planner, become one. Talk with your colleagues, staff, and management to document a plan for contending with emergencies. Plans do not have to be elaborate. The two key points are to talk with others and to document the plan. The third point is to communicate the plan to everyone who may be involved in the emergency situation. Do the same with your family...talk about emergencies, document your plans, and make sure everyone knows about them.
- **Have back-up.** Talk to others in your organization or family to determine who can back you up in an emergency. Likewise, identify for whom can you act as a back-up resource if needed. Communicate where copies of key business files and documents are stored. Explain decisions that are made so that collective and historical knowledge is spread to others. Have alternative means for being reached and for communicating to others who need to hear from you.

The best way to communicate effectively in stressful situations is to use effective communications skills regularly in your daily life. When skills are second nature to you, you can handle situations more effectively...stressful or otherwise.

Learn more about communicating effectively at www.SpringboardTraining.com, www.SuccessLanguage.com, and www.WhyYouTalkSoWhite.com.