



Are Your Communications Skills Advancing?



Since humans first walked the earth, we have had a continuing and unending desire to communicate and interact. Early cave dwellers used simple grunting, then developed crude cave paintings to convey thoughts and events. The Roman Empire developed a massive road system, a type of communications system, which had a major impact on cultural development and commerce. In 1436, German inventor Johannes Gutenberg developed the printing press, revolutionizing human communications. In the 20th century, mass production of paper news media became commonplace, silent pictures led to talking pictures, and radio and telephone connected people instantaneously. By the 1990s, personal computers and the Internet became the most significant communications medium in human development history. Today, we communicate and transfer knowledge all over the world in a matter of seconds through fiber optic networks, satellite communications, software, and wireless networks. Who knows what the future holds?

Regardless, human communication boils down to basic interaction between people: transmitting and receiving a message, which is incredibly complex. Many influences come into play. Did the speaker use the correct words? Did the listener understand the words? What were the tones and inflection used for emphasis, and what was the person's body language? And if communicating in writing, we remove the added dimensions of extra words: tone, inflection, and body language. An effective communicator must craft and polish his or her communications skills over time.

The question is, how well are we communicating, and are we perfecting our skills daily? I hope we can all improve our communications skills by studying this month's theme articles. Doing so, maybe we can move a few steps farther away from using grunting and crude painting of symbolism on the walls in our day-to-day interactions with each other.

Bob Zwitch
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Communications: Continuous Improvement Required



All of our readers can relate to this month's theme: communication. We communicate in all facets of our lives with workplace communications bringing some of our biggest challenges. We are very careful in what we say or don't say. We can be quick to blame customers on bad requirements or communicate poorly when defending project slips, cost overruns, or defects in our work. Communication is a skill that requires continuous improvement. I strive to communicate with trust, honesty, integrity, and sincerity, and to listen openly. The ever-changing dynamics of project work, though, make this easier said than done. Fortunately, I am part of a staff that communicates effectively; I know firsthand how this can bond a team together and help them prosper in a safe and comfortable work environment. An effective team producing a quality product is the best result of all.

This month's issue focuses on improving communication skills among team members. It is filled with excellent advice and lessons learned from implementing project charters, to understanding change management, to creating safe and productive meeting and work environments, to improving communications through process tools, to improving e-mail communications.

Also, we are busy preparing for another year at CROSSTALK. Please note our 2006 co-sponsor team lineup (see page 4) and CROSSTALK Editorial Board (see page 5). A special thanks to everyone behind the scenes who helps with CROSSTALK's continuing journey as an informational and educational source for systems and software professionals. I hope your year is off to a great start.

Tracy Stauder
Publisher