

Communicating those vital skills

Two American women are working with a Cape Town-based company to teach South Africans communication skills. Their two-day seminar, aimed at helping people increase their self-esteem, influence others and make a more powerful impact, will be held at the MRC Conference Centre, Parow, on Wednesday and Thursday this week (March 2 and 3).

By WINNIE GRAHAM, Today's Woman Correspondent.

SOUTH African executives are realising increasingly that an effective communication technique is not only a vital motivational tool in dealing with staff and clients, but impacts directly on the firm's profitability.

As a result, businessmen round the country are striving to improve their communication skills, both by attending training programmes and ensuring that their managers do the same.

Sue Bracksiek, a top US trainer who has provided thousands of people with leadership and communications skills, says surveys in America have revealed that miscommunication results in an enormous loss of time, productivity and money.

"Anyone not adequately trained in communication skills lacks a vital people skill — and can cost his/her firm money," she says. "It's an awful waste to have jobs redone simply because of misunderstandings through inadequate communication."

Ms Bracksiek, from New Mexico, United States, and Judi Moreo, one of the top 60 speakers in America who is currently assisting the Argus Company with training, are running a series of workshops in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town on "communicating for success" during the next two weeks.



Sue Bracksiek

Ms Moreo believes weak communication results in weak middle management. She has found that this is a particular problem in South Africa where, in many cases, there is already a language barrier. This "block" at middle management level is one that has to be overcome if both internal and external customer service is to be improved.

Fear of conflict, she says, often impedes communication, yet this should not be seen as a "negative."

Ms Moreo says: "Conflict arises when our input and feedback is different. But, correctly used, conflict helps clarify the situation. It results in a better understanding both of the other person and of yourself. It helps develop trust and provides a new way of looking at things. Not only does it help discharge feelings, it gives us a wider range of options."

She says people become difficult for many legitimate reasons, but some are chronic complainers, or have bruised egos and want attention or recognition or have a need to dominate.

People need to recognise and manage the communication styles of others, including those of people classified as non-assertives, assertives or aggressives. They need to improve their own communication image as revealed in the voice (is it weak, hesitant or shrill, or warm and well-modulated?) the eyes (averted or open?), the stance and posture (stooped, stiff or well-balanced?) and the hands (fidgety, clenched or relaxed?)

Ms Moreo emphasizes, too, the importance of good listening skills.

"And I mean listening," she says. "If you can't hear, you should get a hearing aid but if you aren't listening you need to develop that skill. Listening is an ability to recognise the feeling behind the contents of a message."

"If you are a good listener, you will not anticipate your answer while the other person is still talking."

The two-day communication workshops will be held in Cape Town tomorrow and on Thursday, in Durban on March 7 and 8, and in Johannesburg on March 9 and 10.

For further information telephone Global Conferences at (021) 683-3265.



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