**BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

We communicate with people throughout each and every day. We communicate through conversation, our expressions and body language, social media, email, telephone, etc. We rely on our communication skills to further our friendships, plan vacations, repair marriages, order dinner, purchase a car, express our opinions, ask for help, negotiate deals, accept job offers, etc.

Since we communicate so frequently through various modes, we should be experts. We’re not. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) surveyed 400 companies with 100,000 or more employees. SHRM found that the companies reported losing $62.4 million per year in revenue due to poor communication. That’s $62.4 million per company, which totals more than $24 billion dollars.

**COMMON BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Regardless of the type of communication: verbal, nonverbal, written, listening or visual, if we don't communicate effectively, we put ourselves and others at risk. Besides physical and technical barriers, there are six barriers to effective communication every employee and manager should strive to eradicate.

**1.Dissatisfaction or Disinterest With One’s Job**

If you are unhappy or have lost interest in your job, you are far less likely to communicate effectively – both on the giving and receiving ends. In other words, your heart isn’t in it. This barrier, is perhaps the most difficult to overcome because it involves changing a mindset, and thus it typically doesn’t change until the person leaves.

**2.Inability to Listen to Others**

Active listening is an important aspect of effective communication. You cannot engage with someone if you are not listening to them because you will tend to make assumptions about their needs based on your perceptions versus reality.

**3.Lack of Transparency & Trust**

It is extremely difficult to communicate anything when there is a lack of transparency and trust. For example, if your staff believes you are holding something back, they will be anxious, some will speculate, and as a result, it will be more difficult for them to process any attempt you make to communicate with them.

**4.Communication Styles (when they differ)**

Everyone has their own communication style. Some people are very direct while others prefer a more indirect approach. Some use detailed data, while others rely on generalities, and so forth. Occasionally, one person is so entrenched in their way of communicating, they find it difficult to communicate with others who rely on a different style. You might hear comments such as, “Mary never explains what she wants me to do, she’s never specific” or “Bill gets so caught up in the weeds, that I lose focus on the bigger picture.”

**5.Conflicts in the Workplace**

Conflict can happen for a variety of reasons and when it does, it becomes a barrier to effective communication. The nature of the conflict is not necessarily important, what is important is working to resolve the conflict. When conflict is not eradicated, it grows and then people begin to take sides, which further impedes effective communication.

**6.Cultural Differences & Language**

It is important to understand the cultural differences in communication. But don’t just think international as in remembering that in Japan one’s surname precedes their given name. There can also be regional differences – for example, a northerner might not like the term "y’all" or even understand the more comprehensive version, "all y’all." While these examples may seem trivial, the point is that cultural differences can occur within the boundaries of the US, and when one does not recognize cultural differences, they risk offending the other person. It is in the offense that communication breaks down.

We all should actively engage in reflecting on our own communication skills. The above list of communication barriers, is a great place to start. Reflection, empathy (putting yourself into the other’s shows), and practice will help you hone your skills. However, no one is perfect, so it is also important to recognize and acknowledge when you make a mistake, which is the first step in keeping the doors to effective communication open.