

# Talk on Communication Skills for Business Applications

ENGINEERING EDUCATION TECHNICAL DIVISION

reported by



Ir. Chew Hong Yuen

The Engineering Education Technical Division co-organised a talk on "Communication Skills for Business Applications" with Engineers Australia Malaysia Chapter and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Malaysia Branch, on 27 February, 2017, at Wisma IEM.

The talk, attended by 32 participants, was delivered by Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hoe, Senior General Manager and Director of Meiden Malaysia.

Ir. Dr Ling started by reviewing the various modes of communication that humans had used, from ancient times to the present day.

Modern communication methods include one-way (memo, facsimile, e-mail, letter), two-way (phone call, in-person), to collaborative (team meetings, consultations, consensus, decision making, group problem solving).

According to Ir. Dr Ling, a worker spends 50% of the day on communication related tasks, 36% trying to contact people, looking for information and scheduling meetings, while 14% is spent on duplicating information and dealing with unwanted communication.

He said the basic communication principle is that in any type of communication, there is a sender and a recipient. The sender sends information and the recipient decodes the received information and responds accordingly to that he/she understands the information.

As such, the sender must be concise and clear as to the purpose and objective of the communication. One must also be aware of the audience and use language that is suitable for the intended audience. Ir. Dr Ling stressed that clarity is vital in any form of communication. One must use clear and precise language so that the intended message will not be misunderstood. Lastly, the recipient must actively listen and then clarify his/her understanding of the message being communicated.

In any business organisation, he explained, there will be external and internal communications. External communication is that between an organisation and its customer, government agencies, clients, public and so on; internal communication is that within the organisation itself.

There are two channels of internal communication: formal and informal. Formal communication consists of

formal reports, memos, briefings and meetings. These can be communicated upward, downward, horizontally, or diagonally throughout the organisation hierarchy. Informal channels are informal emails, ad-hoc talks and the grapevine.

Ir. Dr Ling said the most common communication problems in the workplace are language barriers, personal issues (where employees allow personal disagreements to affect company communication), lack of feedback on communication and poor listening skills.

Other barriers to effective communication include filtering of information so that it will be seen as more favourable to the receiver, selective perception by the receiver based on his/her own needs and personal characteristics as well as defensiveness by the receiver which may retard the communication.

Ir. Dr Ling then discussed the basic types of communicators: Assertive, aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive. He said assertive communicators will clearly and respectfully communicate their own needs and strive for mutually satisfactory solutions. Aggressive communicators will attempt to get their own way through manipulation and control tactics. On the other hand, passive communicators will try and avoid confrontation; they are also compliant and often put the needs of others before their own. Lastly, passive-aggressive communicators are those who avoid direct confrontation but will not hesitate to use devious means to get their own way.

Ir. Dr Ling then discussed the effects of generational differences on effective communication as traditionalists (1922-1945), baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980) and millennials (1981-2000) have different ways of communication. One needs to communicate according to the generational background of the recipient as each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviours, expectations, habits and motivational buttons. Learning to effectively communicate with someone from a different generation can eliminate major confrontations and misunderstandings in the workplace.

Culture also plays a part in effective communications. Ir. Dr Ling said it is imperative to develop an understanding



*Ir. Chew Weng Yuen of the Engineering Education Technical Division presenting a memento to Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hwe*

of, and a deep respect for cultural differences in order to have effective communication with business associates from different cultural backgrounds.

He elaborated on the high-context versus the low-context cultures of various nationalities. High-context cultures are those which rely heavily on non-verbal, subtle situational cues while low-context cultures are those which rely heavily on words to convey meaning.

Ir. Dr Ling said successful leaders are also successful communicators. They use communication as a means to connect with the public and this is what makes them effective. Similarly, whether a business succeeds or fails, is also hinged on trust and communication between the business partners.

The talk ended with the chairman of the session, Ir. Chew Weng Yuen, presenting a memento to Ir. Dr Ling. ■