

**From the Sacramento Business Journal:**

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2006/08/14/smallb3.html>

**Got Growth?**

## **Make sure meetings, e-mails have desired effect**

**Streamline communication channels and procedures to gain time, clarity**

**Premium content from Sacramento Business Journal - by Larry Mandelberg**

Date: Sunday, August 13, 2006, 9:00pm PDT

In real estate the mantra is "location, location, location." Both the novice and experienced can succeed if they can follow this one simple rule.

In business we should have our own mantra, something like "communication, communication, communication," or the three Cs.

Have you ever sent an e-mail and gotten a response that was completely different than what you were expecting?

Ever been in a meeting where you spent the entire time asking yourself what you were doing there and feeling like you were wasting your time?

The seed of every business problem is deeply rooted in a failure to communicate.

Two of the most common forms of communication in business today are meetings and e-mails. Both involve at least two people, and often many more.

To help with your daily efforts to improve communication, I have outlined some rules to keep in mind.

### **Meetings**

1. Know your desired result before you call the meeting, and prepare a clear, brief statement to help you share it with others. It takes a lot less time than explaining something to

everyone once the meeting has begun, and it helps you identify the people you need to be talking to.

2. Make sure you are talking with the right people. Having the wrong people in the room wastes their time, creates questions about the real reason for the meeting, and worst of all, opens the door to discussions not relevant to your desired result.
3. Sell the meeting. Make sure the people you want in that meeting know why you want them there and understand what their role is. The clearer you can be when you ask them to meet with you, the better prepared and focused they can be when they arrive.
4. Have an agenda and share it with the participants far enough in advance of the meeting for them to read it, absorb it, and come prepared with questions or information they may need or want to have with them during the meeting.
5. Stay focused on the desired result. Sometimes that means you have to stray away from the agenda, which is fine as long as the group is making progress.
6. Engage in two-way conversation. It feels more efficient to tell people what you want them to know, but you can't be completely certain you are being understood if you don't get feedback. Listen to what your audience says -- that's where you find proof they hear and understand you.

Every five minutes you spend talking to someone consumes 10 minutes of available time, your five and theirs. When talking to a group of people, you are consuming time at an even faster rate.

## **E-mails**

This subject alone could take up several pages. In the interest of time and space (see No. 5 above), here are six techniques to keep in mind as your fingers float across your keyboard at 3 a.m.

1. E-mail is designed to help you communicate with others when convenient for you, and help them respond when convenient for them. Don't use e-mail if you have an urgent need! Exception: Transferring data -- sometimes there are no adequate options for transferring data and files other than e-mail. When this need arises your recipient should know what you are sending, when it will arrive, and notify you quickly (by phone) if it does not.
2. Use the header properly. Write a meaningful subject line, send to only the right people (see No. 2 above) and be careful who you cc or bcc.
3. Include your subject line in the body of your e-mail. Don't assume the recipient will

connect it to the text in your e-mail.

4. Do not use humor in business e-mails. Period.
5. Be concise, not brief. Write enough to be clear with as few words as possible.
6. Do not use e-mail for complex or involved communications. You lose too much nuance when you give up tone and inflection.

In business, change is a constant, and with change comes the potential for confusion. Take a few moments to absorb and apply these simple rules and watch your communications become more effective while the frustration of being misunderstood gracefully goes away.

Larry Mandelberg is managing principal of Beyond Point B, a Roseville firm that provides executive coaching, leadership training and facilitation. He can be reached at [larry@beyondpointb.com](mailto:larry@beyondpointb.com) or at (916) 787-9909, Ext. 2.