



*Excerpt from Dovetail's new book*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Critical Leadership Skills: Communication, Facilitation, Collaboration, and Conflict Resolution**

Businesses are about people. It is not the equipment that makes you money, it is the decision to buy it, the decision of when to turn it on or off, what to feed it, how hard to push it, and when to let it rest; these and other major decisions are all directly or indirectly made by people. If you know your priorities you will make better decisions, and the more successful the business. It's that simple really. Really!

The old adage "great leaders are born, not made" is just not true. Great leadership is the sum of our experiences, skills, education, training, and development. Great leaders identify clear role models, successful practices, effective systems, and personal behaviors that result in success in the organization. Like it or not, as leaders you are role models for the rest of the staff. As you do, so shall they. And if you're the top leader, owner or CEO - your behaviors have the greatest influence - both for good or bad.

To become a great role model it is critical that leaders become confidently self-aware. Self-aware means you understand your personal strength and weaknesses. "Confidently self-aware" indicates that you are mindful, vulnerable, face your weaknesses and address them. Most leaders today are familiar with a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). But they rarely apply this to themselves. Good decisions are more likely when individuals are able to honestly evaluate themselves and the climate they compete in. A good leader must be constantly self-evaluating his or herself toward continuous improvement.

Great leaders are not perfect. A great strength is in their recognition of their weaknesses and having the confidence to build a team around them that complement, and supplement, their abilities. I would note that neither Bill Gates nor Steve Jobs started their famous enterprises, Apple and Microsoft respectively, alone. They knew they needed other and different skills. A great idea, poorly implemented is... well just an idea. A great idea, well implemented can change the world. Investing time, energy, and resources in developing leadership skills will change your world.

What skills are needed? Do you need to go back to school and finish that MBA? Not necessarily. To compete in today's fast-paced world an organization's highest priority is to share leadership. The primary skills that need to be developed by leaders to make that happen are dominantly interpersonal. These include: invitation, communication, facilitation, collaboration, and conflict resolution. In this book I shall use the following definitions:

*"The employees in the manufacturing plant work just as hard 40 hours a week whether we in the office make good decisions or bad. To make their efforts valuable we need to make good ones."*  
...Eric Bloomquist, Owner  
Colonial Craft

Invitation – is the process of engaging people in achieving goals and objectives through motivation and creating a shared interest in outcomes. Good invitations pull people forward rather than push or force the issue. Daniel Pink points out in his book “Drive” that employees need to feel connected to a larger company goal or purpose.<sup>2</sup> The company vision, mission and values are the foundational invitation a leader makes. *Chapter 6 provides a detailed discussion on creating an organizational vision, mission, and values statements.*

Communication – is the process of transferring information between all affected parties such that organizational objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently. The goal of good communication is that every individual is making the best decisions possible based on the most complete information available. *The balance of this chapter introduces the Mobius communication model, as a process for guiding constructive and successful communication.*

Facilitation – is the process of coordinating individuals (or groups of individuals) to optimize the achievement of the group’s (or organization’s) objectives. The goal of facilitation is the highest level of collaboration possible. *In Chapter 2 I will explore some tools that will help develop your facilitation skills.*

Collaboration – is the process of individuals (or groups) working in concert such that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That is, you are able to achieve a higher level of success by working together and coordinating than if you were all operating independently. *Collaboration is the outcome of good communication and facilitation.*

*To organize and collaborate you must learn to facilitate and communicate!*

Conflict resolution – is the process of resolving and integrating multiple perspectives (critical to collaboration) such that the result is comprehensive rather than iterative. It is not necessarily about disagreement, but rather about bringing various points of view (e.g. representatives of different functions such as sales and operations) to solutions that consider and implement based on all aspects of the situation. *Conflict resolution is addressed in Chapter 12 on Human Resources.*

Leaders also need to be persistent in seeking to achieve outcomes, develop both their own creative natures and support the creativity of the organization, and not be afraid to make mistakes. These three characteristics (persistence, creativity, and fearlessness) are inexorably linked. Great leaders don’t give up on a goal just because one approach didn’t work. They welcome new ideas and aren’t afraid to try new things.

However, success isn’t inevitable. Generally, leaders that are struggling to achieve the kind of success they desire are experiencing a failure of some kind. These failures can broadly be described as:

Failure to gather input – believing you have to solve all your own problems can not only lead to insufficient solutions, but also isolation, loneliness, frustration, and anger at others. To solve things quickly you need to admit you need help, seek it from those around you or

from other experts, and then truly listen to what they say. Generally to get a different result than what is currently going on, you have to do something different. What that is, you might not be able to imagine, but others might. The earlier you ask for help in the planning process the better your plan and the more likely you are not only to achieve it but to get motivated help in implementing it.

Failure to commit – by not clearly declaring your goals you demonstrate a lack of commitment to achieving them. Sure the world is a fluid place, but inaction never got you anywhere. Research has shown that the old saying, “think, speak, and do” has great validity in achieving success. Those individuals and organizations that clearly declare what they want are far more likely to get it. Organizational vision and individual purpose are examples of clear commitments.

Failure to Plan - individuals and organizations fail to write down plans for a lot of reasons, the big one often being that there hasn’t been commitment to anything, thus making change difficult if not impossible to plan for. But if you commit to what you want to achieve, clearly the next step is to plan how to get there. And like commitments, plans are much more successful when you write them down and share with everyone involved. Basically what you are saying is, “I want this and here is how I am going to get it.”

Failure to monitor, evaluate, and adjust – The key to a successful plan is in recognizing it is a living, breathing guide not a prescription. Thus progress must be monitored, evaluated against plan, and activities adjusted as necessary. Just because everything isn’t going the way you thought doesn’t mean you give up on your goals. It just means you now know more than you did and you adjust activities to get back on track. Generally this is done at least quarterly with some adjustments done monthly. Proactive leaders are constantly adjusting to changing situations, but their overall goals don’t change, just how they get there.

Deciding what you want to achieve in life, planning on how to achieve it, getting others to help you achieve your goals, and then monitoring and adjusting activities to make it happen are the fundamental principles of both life and business that we too often take for granted. Interestingly, personal happiness and organizational success are linked; and when you can link personal goals, and passion, with organizational goals great things can happen. You can truly change your world!

*So, basically the keys to success, and the objectives of this book, are:*

- ✓ *Have a plan (written)*
- ✓ *Implement plan (monitor and adjust regularly)*
- ✓ *Do it collectively not singularly (facilitate people)*
- ✓ *Consistently improve (both people and systems)*
- ✓ *Communicate, communicate, communicate*

## Communication as a Process: The Mobius Model

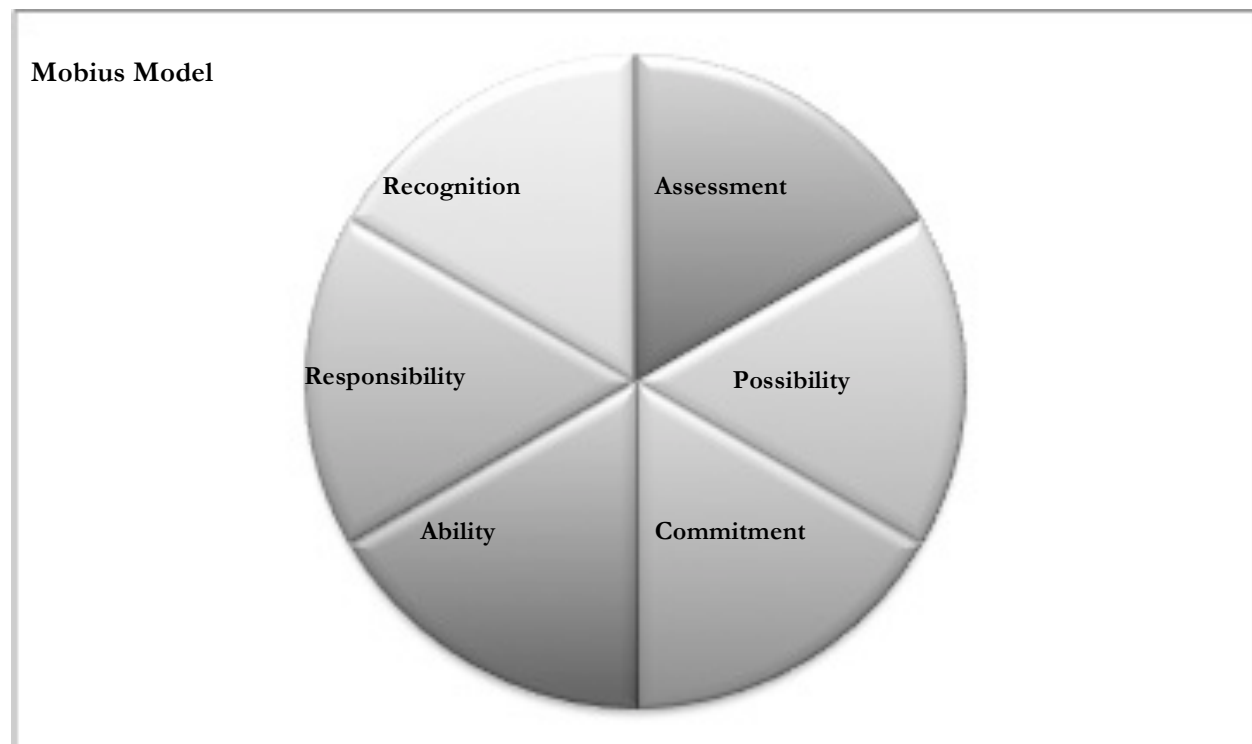
Good communication doesn't happen accidentally and without practice. However, it is a skill that can fairly easily be developed. To foster good communication it is helpful to have a guide or path that maximizes the potential for good communication to occur. On the following page is an image adapted from the Mobius Model, a communication tool originally developed by William Stockton, PhD, based on his research into what made groups of people get the most done, the quickest and most successfully.<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.</sup> He found that there was a clear sequence of events that: fully engaged people in a process, collaboratively incorporated multiple perspectives and ideas simultaneously, and motivated individuals to accomplish group goals and objectives.



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Stockton found that one of the benefits of the sequence was that it provided both the process and the safety for individuals to voice both their creative intuitive (and often internal) ideas and their rational external thoughts to address the issue at hand. He named his model after the individual that discovered the Mobius strip or infinity loop, which is an object that appears to have two sides but actually only has one (see image above).<sup>3</sup> The goal is that individuals engaged in the process bring out their inner thoughts, concerns, and ideas such that they are part of the single, overall discussion.

As adapted herein, the Mobius Model can be used as a tool in specific situations (e.g. planning or conflict resolution) or as simply a way of thinking. Organizations that adopt the Mobius Model find that it dramatically modifies behavior. People quickly recognize the



Adapted from the work of William Stockton, PhD.

efficacy of getting input from others on both the situation and possible solutions, as well as getting agreement from those involved before proceeding to action. It is simply way more effective and, as the old adage suggests, “success breeds success.” The Mobius is a subtle tool with huge implications. It is a tool that not only can be used for better communication, but also results in naturally collaborative processes. It can also used as a process to resolve both minor and serious conflicts. Thus, the basic concepts and framework are introduced in this chapter, and then expanded upon in greater detail and demonstrated through examples in subsequent chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi - (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/mahatmagan105593.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Pink, Daniel. 2009. Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates us. Riverhead Books, published by the Penguin Group, New York.

<sup>3</sup> © Opinegraphics | Dreamstime.com - Mobius Loop Photo