C = CREATIVE COMMUNICATION:

Spend five minutes figuring out how to communicate the decision for every ten minutes you spend deciding.

Richard A. Moran
*Never Confuse a Memo With Reality*

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

Mark Twain
Are you bombarded by stacks of paper, inundated by e-mail messages, and spending half your life in unproductive meetings? Do you find that even with all this flood of “information,” things are happening in your organization and you are sometimes the last to know?

For many organizations, communication has become a deep rut full of dreary memos, dismal meetings, and negative feedback. The result is unhappy, uninformed, or bored employees and ultimately poor customer service and lowered productivity.

One of the most crucial elements of a spirited workplace, I believe, is communication — and not just “ordinary” communication. The more creatively a message is sent, the greater the chances that the message will be noticed and heeded amidst the overwhelming clutter of communications that surround us. So, my challenge to you is to get out of your boring cocoon of routine business communications and fly free. Become aware of all the marvelous, innovative, and creative ideas you can use to assure that your message gets heard, and you will not only improve the spirit in your workplace, but you will also have fun doing it!

Whenever you send a communication, whether it is written, electronic, or face to face, ask yourself three questions:

◆ Does it get the information across clearly and accurately? (This is the Business level and the purpose for the communication).

◆ How does it make the receiver feel? (This is the Human level and includes the choice of words, the tone, and the sincerity of the sender).

◆ Will it surprise the receiver? (This is the element of creativity that is so important in a spirited workplace).

Have some fun as you communicate creatively with others. Harvey Mackay, the author of Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive, told the National Speakers Association at its 1995 annual conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, of one delightful way he got his audience’s attention. He was asked to speak to a very large group of managers of Schick, the razor blade company. After he was introduced, he came out with Band-Aids all over his face. His opening line was, “I knew I shouldn’t have bought that Gillette razor!”

IDEAS FOR CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Have a contest with employees — “If my company/department were a T-shirt, this is what it would say. . . .” Then have them actually design the shirt. Photograph or videotape the results.

2. Put a specially wrapped package of M & M’s (or any other candy which might represent your company) in every package you ship out with a note saying, “We’re glad you’re our customer.”
3. Add a quotation, graphic, cartoon, or seasonal reminder to memos and fax cover sheets. Make them fun and interesting to get people’s attention!

- My fax cover sheet has my personal motto on it, “Spreading Contagious Enthusiasm™” with my logo of a butterfly as well as a quotation from Margaret Mead: “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. Indeed that’s all who ever have.”

- A retail client changes its fax cover sheet every week with the reminder, “Only ____ more weeks to shop for Christmas!”

- Another client titles their fax cover sheet “Little Known Fax About……” and lists interesting things about their organization.

4. Create a service guarantee for your work unit. For example, a suburban hospital says, “If you’re not seen in our emergency room by a professional in 15 minutes, your visit is free!”

5. Post “Street” signs to name hallways in your building. Choose names which communicate your company’s mission or values.

- For an organization that values service, the names might be “Appreciation Avenue,” “Loyalty Lane,” “The Extra Mile,” “Recovery Road,” or “Positive Experience Parkway.”

6. Think of something creative you could offer your customers as a “free” sample. The Savings Bank of Rockville, CT, gives its customers a dime taped on a foldover card that says, “Who says we don’t give free samples?”

7. Start a cartoon collection by topic and by industry. Add these whenever you give a presentation but be sure to get permission if they are copyrighted. You may also use them as ideas to create your own cartoons.

8. Hold “grapevine” meetings (informal meetings with an open agenda giving all employees a chance to set rumors straight) at least once a month to enhance communication and get worries and concerns out in the open.

9. Make sure there is a Human level in your company newsletter. Include customer service stories, company legends, pictures of employees, personal and family events and successes, customer feedback, ideas and resources for personal growth, cartoons, graphics, quotes.

10. Think of creative enhancements you can add to your product or service. Zano’s Hair Design gives complimentary neck and shoulder massages and one of the employees brings you your car when you get your nails done. Some bakeries give a free cookie to each customer’s child.
11. Humanize your voice mail message. (Mine ends with a short “Thought for the Day.”) Call your own voice mail and ask yourself, “Does this sound like someone who loves his or her job? Does this sound like someone I would LIKE to talk to?” IF not, rerecord your message and don’t forget to smile!

12. Look at your business card. Does it have anything distinctive about it? Is there anything that represents you as a unique human being? If not, turn it over and on the back add something on the Human level such as a quotation, a sticker, a motto, or a graphic or picture of something you love.

- My business card has my latest book cover on the front and my personal motto on the back.
- A client has three things written on the back of his business card: “Grandpa, Model Trains, Skiing.”
- Another client has an Albert Schweitzer quote: “The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.”
- When a client’s organization would not let the employees print something on the back of their business cards, she embossed a golf bag!

13. Write songs about different departments, company legends, and individuals who make a difference in your workplace. You can use tunes that everyone knows but make up new words. Share these at company meetings.

### Diablo’s the Place for You and Me

**Lyrics by Julie Fryckman ©2004**  
To the tune “This Land Is Your Land”

This is Diablo, we couldn’t be prouder  
And if you didn’t hear us, we’ll sing a little louder,  
From Park Shadelands, to the Livermore Valley  
Diablo’s the place for you and me.

Walnut Creek’s our home base, membership is growing  
With a Level 3 NICU, our pride is showing  
There’s a beautiful campus, and a brand new E - E - D  
Diablo’s the place for you and me.

Elective surgery, comes to Martinez  
Our physicians and staff are, the best and keenest  
We treat our members, just like they’re family  
Diablo’s the place for you and me – LAST VERSE!

Two-thousand seven, there’s a hospital opening  
On the Antioch campus, by now you’re knowing  
We’re part of Kaiser, we’re making history  
Diablo’s the place for you and me.

### Best in California

**Lyrics by Julie Fryckman ©2005**  
To the tune “Yankee Doodle”

We are Kaiser Permanente  
We proudly say we are KP  
We strive for hospital efficiency, Service that’s great, it’s plain to see.  
You’ll get a personal physician, Inspiring comfort, trust, and more

Henry J. he paved the way  
We’re Best in California  
Kaiser’s the only one for me.

Our goal was full accreditation  
When survey came our way last fall.  
HOORAY!  
We treat our members like they’re Family  
Safety comes first and that’s not all  
Collecting at the point of service  
Keeps financial harmony  
Henry J. he paved the way,  
We’re Best in California  
Kaiser’s the only one for me!

Kaiser’s the only one for me!
14. Send critical messages on bright red paper or in red ink to alert employees immediately of their importance.

15. Have a supply of candy bars to give to colleagues when they have done something for you (Snickers – they made you laugh. Lifesavers – they helped you out. Zero – they did a job perfectly. 100 GRAND – what they are worth to your team.)

A friend recently sent a business colleague and internal customer the following huge 3-D “treat” card with each of the candies glued onto a poster board amidst the words:

You are CERTStainly a LIFESAVER and worth 100 GRAND to us! Sometimes life is a ROCKY ROAD, but you are always MOUNDS of (Almond) JOY, laughs, and SNICKERS! You are a BOUNTY of fun, very CAREFREE, and EXTRA special. SKOR big and count down to PAYDAY. Best wishes, hugs, and KISSES!

16. Make business cards for all employees, no matter what their job. This will give them a special feeling of importance.

17. Start a collection of outstanding customer service stories. Make a booklet of the stories and give them as a holiday gift to employees and customers.

18. Use “Do Not Disturb” signs when working on intense projects. With these signs, post a time when you CAN be interrupted.

19. In groups of four, have employees find at least three creative things they have in common and write them in a circle on a piece of flip chart paper. Then have each person take a corner and write two things about himself or herself that are unique. Post these in the break room and have the rest of the company guess who each corner belongs to.

20. When someone has done something extraordinary or a team has achieved a major goal, take out an ad in the local paper celebrating them.

21. Hold quarterly focus groups with some of your customers to find out how they are feeling about your company.
22. Do the same thing with a cross section of your employees. Ask for what they love about the company and then their concerns and their ideas for solutions.

23. Schedule an appreciation party for all employees after work one evening. Serve finger food and ask them in pairs to design a bumper sticker for your company. Then vote on the two or three best ones and have them printed to hand out to employees and customers.

24. Start a BARTER LIST online. Have employees share “What I have to offer” and “What I need from someone else.”

25. Give each person in a meeting a paper bag and several sheets of paper. Ask everyone to wad up the paper and put it back in the bag. Then each time someone in the meeting uses what my speaker friend, Linda Larson, calls a “killer phrase,” words or expressions that stifle creativity, everyone else can bombard that person with paper wads.

26. Ask each person to create a personal mantra, quotation, or affirmation. Post it in his or her workspace to repeat as needed.