

FEATURE ARTICLE II



STAYING PROFESSIONAL IN TROUBLED TIMES[®]

BY CATHY EMMA

ABSTRACT:

In a year of transformation, communication skills can make or break your efforts. Business Communications Trainer and Coach Cathy Emma gives sage advice on how to keep yourself and your team motivated while managing the emotions and anxiety that poor economic periods inflict on most individuals.

THE ENVIRONMENT:

Wall Street bailouts, mortgage failures, volatile markets and unemployment are having dramatic impacts on the business world. The current financial crisis with economic downslides is hard on everyone. Frustration, anxiety and fatigue are widespread. Companies, organizations and individual business professionals are finding it difficult to maintain stability and productivity. There is also serious concern about the loss of professional presence and good judgment in doing business. Performance levels and morale is low, and customer service is diminishing. That's the bad news.

The good news is that we are in a new era of CHANGE, and recovery is on the way, but you must be willing to take full responsibility for your own rescue plan and focus on building for the long term.

Effective communication is the key. Everything in life boils down to one's ability to communicate well. The most successful business professionals and leaders typically are also the best communicators. This skill is especially relevant in a slow economy, but it applies in good times as well as bad.

The way you look, speak, write, act and work defines YOU and your level of professionalism. Staying professional has never been more challenging. You need every tool, technique and strategy to keep that winning edge and maintain business success. Now is the time to **invest in you** by honing and reinforcing your communication and interpersonal skills. Your self confidence will be bolstered, your stress levels reduced, and you will be taken to a more vital level of professional presence in spite of what is going on in the environment.

Use it or lose it. Communication skills diminish when they are not practiced and polished. We need to take extra care in tough times when emotions run high and anxiety exists. Whether it's face to face, speaking on the phone, writing or communicating electronically, you need to get your messages across in the most effective way. Client and customer loyalty increases when we keep our professional attitudes and integrity at a high level during a down economy. Business credibility is restored and a sense of security and mutual support and trust is felt by everyone. Whatever mode of communication you use, being professional never goes out of style!

A Few Tips for Communicating Professionally, Especially in Troubled Times

- Understand that attitude plays an important role in getting you through any crisis. Keeping a positive attitude will favor your personal welfare.
- Focus on excellent customer service by displaying a high level of professionalism in all your business communications with clients, customers and colleagues.
- Dress appropriately for your work environment and pay close attention to your appearance and body language. Both are powerful non-verbal communicators. Think "company image."

- Speak clearly with energy and enthusiasm. Your voice and speech are important parts of your professional image. Keep them aligned with your credentials. Your speaking style is your “verbal” business card.
- Use excellent telephone and voice mail skills. Listen attentively to your caller to receive complete and accurate messages. This attention to detail will add to your productivity and business success. Return all calls in a timely manner. Courtesy counts!
- Keep your email communications professional. Review the basic guidelines of good written communication and follow them. Check spelling, grammar and typos, and keep your messages brief and clear. Email is business correspondence. Hold it in high regard.
- Participate in professional development classes and training programs to reinforce your skills. Leaders can give their teams a boost by offering training sessions to help maintain productivity levels, stabilize business and raise morale.

Maintaining professional attitudes in troubled times puts you head and shoulders above the competition and differentiates you from the pack. Confident communication produces business in any economy. Professionalism is a personal commitment that you make to yourself. Harness all of your energies and commit to creating your own recovery plan by investing in **YOU**. Stay professional and you will profit!



Cathy Emma

Cathy Emma is a Business Communications Trainer/Coach and Professional Speaker. She is the president of VOICE POWER IN BUSINESS and a professional member of the National Speakers Association and the American Society for Training and Development. For more information on Cathy Emma, visit www.cathyemma.com or email cathy@cathyemma.com or phone 630-513-5145.



HIGHEST QUALITY SEARCH, INC.

DEAR KATHY®

In a year of transformation for many finance professionals, we at HQ Search, Inc. want to provide the most of what finance professionals need. Hence, the introduction of this feature that focuses on the soft skills.

Another new addition is a career advice column on our blog where you can write in confidentially with your question, which will be answered by HQs' owner, Kathy Graham.

Graham will start her new column, *Dear Kathy®*, right here with a question that pertains to some topics that Cathy Emma just addressed.

I'm behind in answering my emails and phone calls. What should I do? – Tardy in Chicago

Dear Tardy:

Cathy Emma says that you should first look at how to simplify what you're doing so that you can stay on top of answering phone calls and emails. Letting them build up is not good for your long term success. If you can't do it all yourself, is there some way to outsource some of your work to free you up?

Graham adds: While you're getting caught up, remember to sincerely apologize to those you've inconvenienced.

Visit www.hqsearch.com/blog for more career advice from Graham.