

IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

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Better communication remains workplace issue, say seminar speakers

Posted: Monday, July 30, 2007

Workplace and customer communication may not sound like the most exciting business seminar topic, but that didn't stop 110 people from showing up for a workshop in Boise last week.

Cleaning up your communication act is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to get more out of your marketing efforts, said Karleen Savage of Code Red Public Relations, Eagle.

Way too many business people are making mistakes with e-mail, voice mail and conference calls, said former TV journalist Dale Dixon. He heads Dale Dixon Media in Nampa and is executive director of the Idaho Rural Partnership.

Their comments came at the "Crack the Communications Code" workshop July 24 at the Red Lion Downtowner hotel. The Idaho Department of Labor's Employer Association of Ada County presented the event.

A big issue now is that the workplace includes at least three age groups, all with markedly different ways of looking at the world and communicating, Savage said.

For example, Baby Boomers often puzzle over the light-on-punctuation e-mails that many younger workers send, she said.

But figuring out the different perspectives and communication styles among generations is easier than traditional marketing-science approaches, and pays dividends in the form of improved teamwork and better knowledge of your own company and its customers, Savage said.

This is one of the easiest forms of marketing, she said.

"Most people think marketing is the printed stuff. This is actual marketing," she said.

Dixon recommended constant work on communication and listening skills.

Displaying a message laden with federal-agency buzzwords, he posed the question to the audience: "What does this e-mail mean?"

Confusing computer-relayed messages became an even bigger issue when wireless-phone text messaging took hold, Dixon said.

Additionally, time-wasting conference calls are common, and a voice mail can be "dangerous," he said.

"Speak to be heard," Dixon said. "What is the message?"

Most people need to focus more intently, he said.

People should frequently listen to their own voice-mail recording,

heard by others, Dixon said.

"Don't make it your comedic debut or introduce every member of your family," he said. "I'm busy too."

Savage and Dixon agreed that setting formal policies on communication practices – e-mail and cell phone use, for example – can help many workplaces.

Poor communication costs corporations and the government millions of dollars a year, Dixon said. A survey of 120 corporations employing 4 million workers overall revealed that one-third of their employees fail to meet the writing-skill requirements of their own job descriptions, he said.

It helps when the person delivering the message focuses on the person receiving it, Dixon said. The person delivering the message should enunciate, articulate and check for understanding.

Savage said Baby Boomers are good leaders, particularly in growth and global companies.

They're loyal, are good at mentoring and evaluating, believe in good pay for hard work, and like winning, she said. They have experienced gains and losses.

Workers in the younger generations are more technology savvy, she said. They value skill and educational development as well as time off, she said.

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