

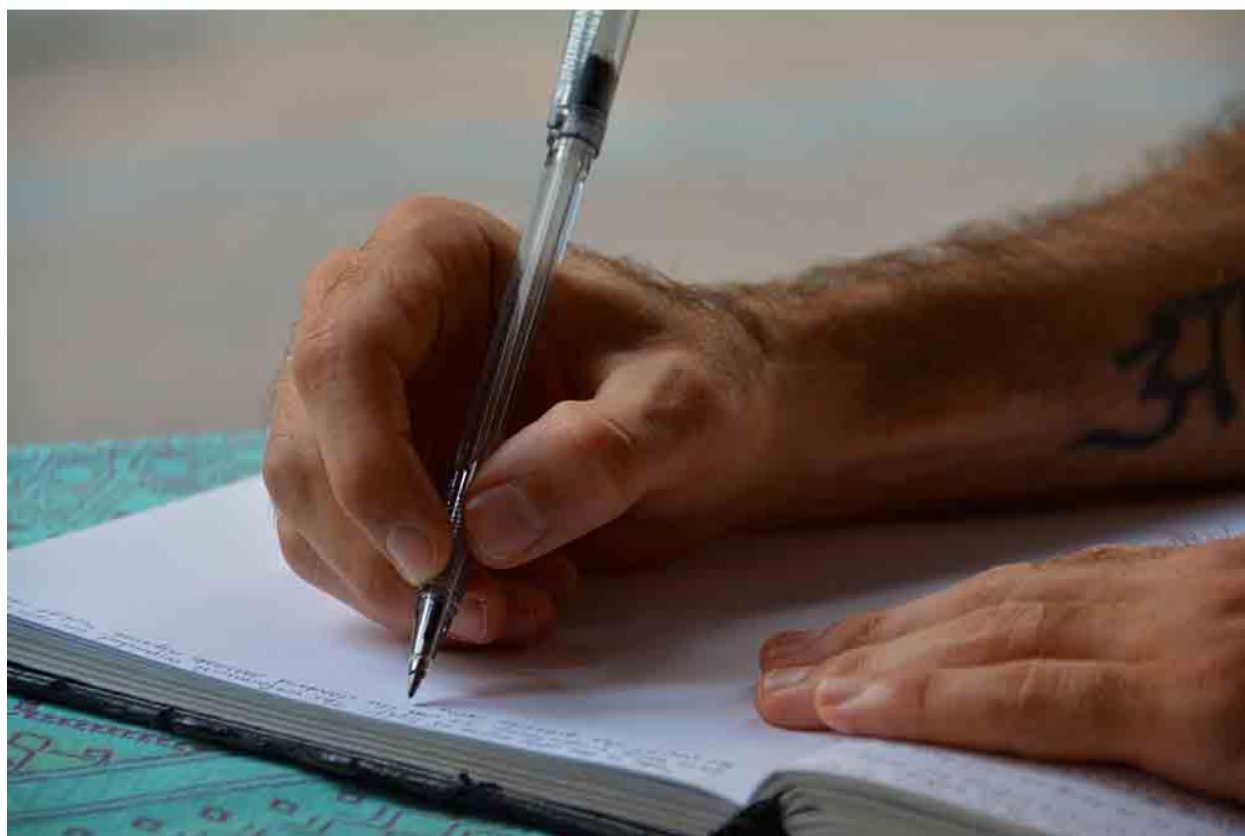
ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 4, April 2019

www.ijellh.com

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High Impact Business Communication Skills for Young Professionals

With the increased complexity of modern life, growing demands of the job market, IT revolution, globalization of businesses- the meaning of ‘Success’ needs to be redefined for every professional, be it an executive in a multinational company, or a scientist, a businessman, or an engineer in a professional institution.

Success depends not just on the ability to transfer knowledge but also analyze, organize and present essential information effectively. Companies look for individuals who have analytical skills, team-building skills, good interpersonal communication skills, value and principle centered approach to work etc. Therefore the need to make language learning classes more result-oriented and learners more employable is crucial. The principle approach is to convert the language classes into training grounds for real-life business situation, thereby bridging the gap between the expectation of the business world and the teaching-learning process.

The present study focuses on developing strategies to improve the professionals speaking skills, language competence and behavioral attitudes towards work leading better opportunities of employment.

This paper chronicles the demands the job market makes on a professional and suggest some classroom techniques to develop student's attitudes towards work, enhance high-impact communication skills, and to focus on language competency development. Some of the strategies suggested is to a large extent from my own experience and partly from research done in EST(English for Science and Technology).

Introduction: Concurrent with the changes in the job market, the demand for effective English Language teaching has acquired a new salience today. The need to make the learners more employable and business oriented, resulted in converting the classroom into a workshop in communication and language learning, when the students should be engaged in realistic business situation and share their knowledge, use cooperative and analytical skills to be able to bring about the best possible solution or discussion to the problem in hand.

Communication in Business:

The information flow in a business forms a network of both formal and informal communication. The formal channels of communication include meetings, participating in discussions, given presentations etc., A business professional is also required to give on the job instructions and messages, persuade, discuss, predict and analyze or convince the clients or even the boss.

The informal channels of communication are the thousands and thousands of personal communication that take place in any organization, also known as the "grapevine" in management literature. The "grapevine" carries far more information than it may appear. Wise managers recognize the presence of "grapevine" in the organization and keep in touch with it and turn it into a constructive tool.

This paper seeks to chronicle the need to make ... learner competent in Business English, which requires the use of specific vocabulary and phrases, pronunciation and the ability to be an effective conversationalist. This means that the learner has to move to a more sophisticated level of language use and get out of a learning rut.

Get out of the learning rut:

Some learners find it difficult to express simple ideas in English while others face difficulty in expressing exactly what they wish to say in the way they wish to say it. As business organizations require professionals to be effective communicators in formal and in informal situations, learners should be able to progress to a more sophisticated level of language use.

The paper addresses learners who can express ideas but are unable to make any progress to a more sophisticated level of the language, learners have reached a 'Plateau' in learning or what the language teaching expert-Karen Adams calls "the learning rut". Such learners would like to use English more effectively as their business or future jobs demand effective communicators.

Professionals in business schools and colleges are at an intermediary stage where the ability to express is evident, the ability to vary, to speak how to speak and express ideas is wanting. The reason being the lack of motivation to learn more. And teachers of English language need to bring the learners out of this learning rut.

Steps to be followed:

1. Find something new to talk about: A reading group should be formed in the class and a book review is done periodically to help in generating a good discussion and also improve the learners vocabulary.

2. Meet new people: Students stick to their own peer group with similar interests, bringing about a stagnant way of thinking and talking the same thing all the time. Students should be a part of a club or attend events where English is spoken and meet new people. It creates opportunities for the student to use English in different ways.
3. Activate what is already known: Statistics shows that more number of words are known than is actively used. It benefits the students to have a few brainstorm in sessions in class on any given topic and bring to the forefront the words and phrases
4. Listen to different programmers: Listening has become the least important skill especially with the students. In business communication much of the job depends on listening. By listening to different programmers, students vocabulary is widened and hence communication is more effective
5. Learners should set new learning goals: It is necessary to revitalize the approach to learning English and will give them a reason to learn and do more.

The communicative approach:

Once the learners are helped to get out of a learning rut they are motivated enough to carry out the activity with ease. The learners should be given a lot of opportunities in the form of activities in the classroom to be able to use the language more effectively. Activities should be more of role plays, group discussions, debates and case studies, to help the learners Communicate with each other.

Through the communicative approach the learner is able to learn many skills that are valuable in the business world today like

1. To make public presentations
2. To work in teams
3. To actively share the knowledge.

4. To deal with the values and ways of doing business
5. To actively participate in problem-solving activities.

The communicate approach focuses on the use of communication skills to present solutions or help the learners in the group to express ideas. It is a way to use language more effectively and it is enjoyable for the students to take part in.

It is very important that the students of business English need to communicate in a level that requires the use of specific vocabulary for which the need to widen their active vocabulary, be effective conversationalists and improve pronunciation become vital.

The three specific areas are as follows:

1. How to widen your vocabulary:

Many learners feel incapable of continuing a conversation because of the lack of enough words. The student learners can't really express exactly what is felt. They can widen their vocabulary by

- a) Making a conscious decision to choose the words that are used in business English.
- b) Having an emotional attachment to new words it is likely that the learners would remember easily
- c) Making meaning families for e.g. thinking of different situations in business and associating the words to it.
- d) Reading more business English magazines. It will bring to mind lots of new vocabulary
- e) Looking for synonyms- while reading the learner should look for the number of different words the writer uses to express the same idea

How to be a good conversationalist:

A very important business skill is to be able to network effectively. The purpose of this skill is to establish contact. It is not as much how the learner communicates that's

important as how the learner helps others communicate. This would mean, asking questions, listening to the other person, to be genuinely interested.

The learners should follow the tips mentioned below while at a discussion table or during a presentation.

- a. Think of possible questions to open up the conversation with.
- b. Respond to an answer with more detailed question.
- c. Use of words like 'really', 'I see' shows genuine interest and encourages the speaker to say more
- d. Avoid questions which have a 'yes' or a 'no' for an answer.

Ask detailed or open ended question

Improving pronunciation:

Pronunciation needs to be improved and most learners find it difficult to do so because they aspire to sound like native speakers which is very difficult to achieve.

However some adjustments in pronunciation can be done so that people can do better.

This can be done by:

- a. Identifying the problem sounds that are difficult for the individual and work on them.
- b. Identifying the stress/accent for new words with two or more syllables.
Putting the stress on the word syllable is also one reason for mispronouncing the word
- c. Do not confuse fluency with speed. Try to slow down and stress the important words in your speech
- d. Do not imitate the native speakers: Aiming to sound like a native speaker is being very ambitious but to be clearer to the listener is what should be aimed

at. In this respect identifying any aspect of the pronunciation which gets in the way of understanding should be worked on first.

Activity 1: Group Discussions

Rationale for using this approach

Professional need to have conversational management skills such as turn taking as well as paralinguistic skills such as appropriate use of eye contact, face characteristics and gesture all of which need to be integrated in a successful performance of group discussions. Group discussion also improves their thinking skills and the ability to draw from their knowledge of should be a fair team player and also be able to convince his peer group about what he wishes to express. Appropriate language (formal) without having to use informal or slang language does give them an insight into what it is to be a part of a meeting or panel discussion in future jobs they could be employed in. the approach therefore employed is that of the skill and task based approach and also to generate discussion through the use of knowledge acquired through reading or listening about the topic from other sources like newspapers, radio channels or television.

Procedure:

In order to make the students aware of the way a group discussion takes place I spend a few sessions telling them what it exactly entails.

I brief them up on the kind of language they need to use, the appropriate discourse markers they need to use while participating in the discussion.

I group the class into teams of 8 each or more depending on the strength of the class.

They are allowed to jot down points.

In the meantime I give instructions to Team 2 that each one should observe any one of the members in Team 1 and write points on which he will later give the feedback.

Team 1 starts discussing the topic for 8-10 minutes.

The group discussion is shot on a handycam to later show their performance on the Television.

Then each member of Team 2 gives his/her feedback on the person they have chose.

Towards the end I sum up the feedback and present my observations.

Feedback:

The purpose of giving the feedback in my class is to caution my students not to play negative role in group discussions. This also gives them an idea of what role they were playing, whether they were a democrat, a sleeper, an imitator etc., The central idea is to make them better team managers and players.

The students are also required to give a feedback on their friends participation in group discussion, this brings into the forefront their observations in the form of making notes on the performance, as well as the analytical skills which are so needed by professional these days. The observation sheet which he comes up with is a form of a report on his peer performance and therefore helps him to categorize the performance.

Activity 2: Case study

Rationale for using this approach:

Case study can be an important activity to encourage discussions and interaction among the learners. Case studies help the learners to assume different roles and analyze, discuss and express views like someone other than themselves. This activity also hones

students' verbal and non-verbal⁷ skills. Case studies can prove to be an effective activity to teach communication skills.

Topic: Management/Employee Discussions

Procedure:

Each group will function as a separate committee. Each committee will consist of (a) front-line employees with specific demands and (b) members of the Human Resources Department who possess a good knowledge of motivation and management theory. The employees on the committee should represent specific employee groups, such as check-in, baggage, cabin, and reservations personnel. The students should begin by discussing what motivates personnel in front-line jobs such as this. The students can discuss this in general, using motivation theory, and then talk about what would motivate you in your specific job.

The next step will be to discuss managerial and approaches that management should adopt to meet the employees' demands. Here you will have to step out of your roles as employees and look at the problem from the point of view of consultants trying to consider the needs of both management and employees. This statement should include (1) a statement of management's attitude toward their employees, (2) a motivational package to meet the needs of the employees, and (3) changes in organizational structure to increase communication and give front-line employees more say in company policy. In addition, it should include a statement about the importance of a customer and service-oriented attitude among the employees. The statement of policy should be illustrated with concrete examples of how this policy and attitude will be implemented in the future, (see the Vocabulary list on pages 66-67 for more ideas concerning motivation).

Feedback:

The teacher gives feedback on the students' performance during the activity focusing mainly on vocabulary used, the body language exhibited and analytical skills shown. This helps enhancing the performance of the students.

Conclusion:

The communicative approach allows for the teaching of both language and communication skills by actively engaging the learners in the solutions of realistic business situations the paper emphasized on the need to get the learners out of a learning rut, to widen their active vocabulary, to effective conversationalist and to improve pronunciation. All of which is couched in the communicative approach through conducting activities like group discussion, role play and case studies.

This approach encourages the learners to learn to share their knowledge, use cooperative and analytical skills. The focus of the study is to make every student capable of expressing ideas effectively so as to move to a more sophisticated level of language use so in demand of the business world today.