



TRENTON HIGHTOWER

A common language increases productivity

By TRENTON HIGHTOWER

It seems like common sense: The essence of effective communication is a common language.

Babies know this. Infants worldwide all begin making the same sounds. Eventually, they form those sounds into the words they hear in the world around them. How else would they learn to move effectively through the world around them if not for a common language with a shared vocabulary?

One of the most effective measures a manager can take to improve communication, reduce confusion and increase productivity is to develop the basis of a common language. When

there is broad-based consistency in vocabulary, terms and definitions, the result is better understanding, increased productivity and markedly better outcomes.

There are three compelling reasons to take the time and effort to develop a common language for your staff:

- Identifying the exact words for key concepts and activities saves time and increases productivity.

- Training new employees becomes easier, less time-consuming and more effective. Because a common language emerges from a clearly-defined mission, it assures that the most important concepts are presented to new team members first.

- A common language with a

shared vocabulary allows a team member to step in and complete a colleague's project when necessary.

- When communicating with clients, a common language helps make sure expectations are clear at the outset, and outstanding results are more likely.

For example, the benefits of developing a common language with a shared vocabulary are clear to the members of Frederick Community College's Customized Training team.

Ask any staffer what the group does, and the answer will always be the same — consultation, assessment, training development, training begin-

(See HIGHTOWER Page 9)

Curriculum vitae

Trenton Hightower is the associate vice president of FCC/JTA customized training at Frederick Community College. In addition, he has completed "Train the Trainer" courses in the following areas: Using the Malcolm Baldrige by Kodak, Dale Carnegie sales course, Xerox strategic planning process, systems curriculum and instructional development by OSU (certified), Ziglar Education Systems, and DDI certification. Mr. Hightower has a Bachelor's in communication/public relations and Master's in administration of higher education.

Hightower: Language

(Continued from 6)

ning, evaluation, follow-up.

This consistency was only possible after we took the time as a group to discuss our mission, vision and values. From these discussions emerged a common language that we all committed to using. The standardization and shared understanding of the terms and concepts saves the group the time and frustration caused by miscommunication.

Secondly, the team can classify any of the hundreds of classes we offer into what we've decided as a group to call the Four Quadrants: Leadership & Supervisory; Computer Skills; Job Specific Skills, and Individual & Staff Development.

Keeping the offerings organized among the four quadrants keeps communication within our

department clear and on target. Most importantly, presenting the complex array of courses available to clients using these common terms promotes better understanding as well.

Because time limitations often affect the level of training that can be achieved, we have also developed a common language to make sure we understand what our clients' expectations are.

We have identified three levels of training: awareness, learning and practice, and mastery. Now that the team and our customers share the same understanding of what constitutes each level, expectations are more often met.

Take the time to develop the basis of a common language with your team. The return on that investment will be better understanding, greater productivity and increased customer satisfaction.