

Miscommunication

Some words mean different things to different people. Business relationships – which include owners, executives, managers, clients, employees, associates, vendors and competitors – are the very foundation for a firm’s success. These relationships require effective communication, which often means just starting a conversation. Many times relationships end with little more than just talk and the results become very expensive indeed. Instead of real communication in these relationships, talk occurs with little value.

One time, the president of a large company called his corporate finance manager on the phone looking for a particular figure. She gave him this number: two-thirty-nine-forty and he jotted the number down. What he had heard and subsequently wrote down was \$239,040. Being familiar with the data, he understood what she was saying, but others may not have.

A few days later while teaching a staff gathering on the subject of communication, he asked a group of employees what these words meant to them. They came up with at least eight different answers. Two numbers given repeatedly were: 1) \$230,940 and 2) \$239,040. There is a significant difference in just these two numbers—a \$9,000 difference!

- What did she mean to say? \$239,040
- What did she really say? Two thirty nine forty
- What did he hear? \$239,040
- What did others hear? Eight variations!

It is important to ask questions or restate a point for clarification of meaning. A continuous goal should be to say what we mean and be sure that what we say is what was heard. In the communication process, we spend almost all of our time thinking about sending (i.e. talking and writing), yet listening is an even more important communication skill. Listening is hard work! The brain must struggle to understand what someone is saying. One must be both objective and reflective in communication behavior.